



Bitterne Park School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116458
LEA Southampton LEA
Inspection number 285408
Inspection dates 8 March 2006 to 9 March 2006
Reporting inspector Alan Marsh

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Copsewood Road
School category	Community		Bitterne Park
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Southampton SO18 1BU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	02380325200
Number on roll	1355	Fax number	02380325222
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Russell Henson
Date of previous inspection	30 April 2001	Headteacher	Mrs Susan Trigger

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Bitterne Park is a large, mixed comprehensive school in Southampton. It is oversubscribed. Almost all students are White British. Relatively few are entitled to free school meals. The number of students with special educational needs is above average. The school has a full staff complement. It was awarded specialist status as a performing arts school in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Bitterne Park is an outstanding school in which students flourish: almost all fulfil their potential. It is a mature, well run community in which relations between staff and students are founded on respect, care and aspiration and all share a sense of purpose. The headteacher leads with passion and vision. Leaders and managers know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well. Inspectors agree with almost all the judgements the school makes about itself, including its overall effectiveness. The steps taken to improve the school since the last inspection have been highly effective. The school also has an outstanding capacity to improve further. Almost all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make outstanding progress during their time in the school, particularly in Years 10 and 11. They have a sense of pride and purpose which motivates them strongly. Their progress is monitored very closely by teachers and they are helped to achieve ambitious but realistic targets. A few of the most able students do not make as much progress as they might. Teaching and learning are good. Working relations are excellent. Teachers use assessment criteria skilfully to encourage learning. All students, at whatever level of ability or need, are very well cared for and guided watchfully through the school and beyond. The school's specialist performing arts status is used very effectively to foster skills such as teamwork and verbal presentation across the curriculum. The curriculum offers outstanding breadth and choice. Resources are satisfactory. The school uses them all imaginatively and efficiently and offers outstanding value for money; but some accommodation is in need of refurbishment. Students participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities; but they lack opportunities to develop a fuller awareness and understanding of a multi-cultural society.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the percentage of the highest grades achieved by the most able students at GCSE
- Develop further the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons to stimulate students and promote independent learning
- Develop more opportunities for multi-cultural experience and awareness

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The progress students make from entering the school in Year 7 until the end of Year 11 is outstanding. The trend in the improvement is much stronger than the national trend. Students' outstanding progress is mainly due to the very effective use of data to analyse and improve performance, and the setting of challenging targets for individual students and subjects that are monitored and reviewed assiduously. This internal competition drives progress.

Students start in Year 7 with standards that are above average. They make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and reach standards by the end of Year 9 which are well above

average. They make even better progress in Years 10 and 11. The percentage of students achieving five or more higher grades at GCSE has risen significantly over the last three years and is now well above average. The progress made by the most able students is not quite as good as that of other ability groups, and their achievement of the highest grades at GCSE is below average in most subjects. Performance in most subjects is equally high; results in drama, history and physical education are exceptional. The action taken by the school to address the weaker performance in ICT and design technology is already having a positive effect.

The school works very effectively to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who enter the school with particularly low levels of attainment. These students also make outstanding progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students are proud of their school and enjoy it. They display an appetite for learning in lessons. Attendance and punctuality are very good. Students feel safe and they trust the school's ability to deal effectively with occasional incidents of conflict or intimidation.

Behaviour is exemplary: students' exuberance and restraint are well balanced. Students get on very well with each other and their teachers and a strong community spirit prevails. They cooperate well with each other and develop strongly as highly confident, articulate individuals. They participate enthusiastically in the wide range of cultural and recreational activities on offer. Opportunities for multi-cultural experiences are fewer and consequently students' insights into cultural diversity are less well developed. Skills developed extensively in performing arts lessons, such as team work, constructive peer criticism and presentation skills, are very successfully transfused throughout the curriculum.

Through the highly effective school council, students have an influential voice in decision making. For example, they have supported initiatives to promote healthy eating and have successfully lobbied for improvements to the drinking water and toilet facilities. They exhibit very high levels of social responsibility and personal initiative. Prefects and mentors assume important roles in the day-to-day running of the school and contribute strongly to programmes, such as those to combat bullying.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good, with some outstanding features. The school has a slightly inflated view of the overall quality of teaching and learning, but it is fully aware of where the strengths are because it monitors and evaluates lessons rigorously. Astutely, the focus for improvement has recently changed from how teachers teach to how and what students learn. In the best lessons, learning is closely linked to

assessment criteria: students know exactly what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve their prospective levels or grades. Working relations in lessons are excellent. For example, in a Year 8 drama lesson, skilful guidance and intervention from the teacher resulted in excellent interaction between students. Students are regularly involved in assessing their own and their peers' work and so develop shrewd self-critical skills. For example, in an outstanding Year 9 mathematics lesson students suggested various hypotheses and then questioned and refined each others' contributions.

Where lessons are merely satisfactory, work is not always planned well enough to meet the full range of students' potential. Consequently, some more able students are working at a pace that underestimates what they are capable of learning. In some subjects the integrated use of ICT to stimulate students and promote independent learning is underdeveloped. Occasionally teachers talk too much, which limits the time students are actively learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school's curriculum is outstanding and meets the full range of students' needs and capabilities. As a result, all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make excellent progress. The school has exploited its specialist performing arts status to offer additional curricular breadth and choice.

Progression from Year 9 to Year 10 is very well managed through the personal programmes for learning that are designed for students. An extensive range of pathways is available, providing excellent preparation for further education and future working life. These include academic and vocational GCSE courses, advanced academic courses, specific vocational qualifications and apprenticeships. There are many opportunities for students to develop work-related skills.

There is an excellent range of extra curricular activities, principally in performing arts, sports and other recreations, and participation rates are high.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The pastoral services provided by the school are outstanding. Students are expertly nurtured because the assessment, monitoring and fostering of their educational progress and personal growth are scrupulous. Termly review days allow for the monitoring of progress and the setting of challenging targets. Students appreciate being closely involved in these evaluations of their development; but relatively few parents attend, to the school's disappointment. Any student's academic underperformance or personal concern is quickly identified and action taken. The precision of the monitoring also enables the school to provide excellent advice and guidance in relation to curriculum choices and progression to further education or employment.

Students' safety and protection are thoroughly assured. The school is particularly watchful of the progress and general welfare of vulnerable children and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who consequently thrive. Very good links with external agencies ensure that students have access to all the sources of help they might need.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. Standards have risen significantly over the last three years and the school is now highly effective. The school judges its own strengths and weaknesses accurately, although it slightly over-estimates the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher and senior management team display excellent leadership and vision. They have implemented very effective strategies to improve the school since the last inspection. They monitor the progress and performance of their students rigorously and use these data expertly to spot trends and focus remedial attention. As a result, almost all students make excellent progress; the school recognises that the progress made by the most able students is not as good as that made by other ability groups, and is already focusing attention on improving the proportion of the highest grades at GCSE. School leaders take full account of the views of students who consequently feel strongly involved in their own school community. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary and respect and responsibility are evident throughout the school. The views of parents and carers are actively sought. Governors are very supportive and well-informed. They receive regular and detailed information about the school's performance and use it to ask searching questions.

The leadership team has established excellent links with a wide range of partners, including local primary schools, colleges and external services for children. Middle managers enjoy a consultative environment in which they are encouraged to contribute to the development of the school. Qualifying and newly qualified teachers experience very stimulating, well-organised support. Resources are used efficiently, although some accommodation is in need of refurbishment. The school makes very imaginative use of its specialist performing arts ethos to encourage behaviour that is socially responsible and learning that is active and creative.

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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?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

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

Students

We enjoyed visiting your school recently to inspect it. Thank you very much for making us feel welcome and for talking to us so frankly. We have now written our report and hope some of you will want to read it but this letter is addressed specifically to you and sums up what we think of Bitterne Park.

We think you go to an outstanding school which has the potential to get even better. We've given it our top grade. You do very well in your national tests and examinations and make very good progress at school. Teachers know and look after you very well. Because they talk with you about your targets and check your progress carefully most of you achieve your potential. You yourselves deserve a lot of credit for all this. You come to school with positive attitudes and a real desire to learn. You show respect to each other and to your teachers and behave responsibly. Many of you play a vital part in running the school well through the school council and the prefect system. You also told us how much you enjoy drama, dance and music. We think that some of the best teaching uses many of the skills you develop in those subjects, such as self-confidence and good teamwork, to help you do better in other subjects.

Some things can still be improved at Bitterne Park: * some teachers need to make better use of computers and interactive white boards to stimulate you * the most able students need to make even better progress and achieve more of the highest grades at GCSE* you should be given more opportunities to experience and learn about other cultures You showed and told us you are proud of your school. You have a right to be so.

Good luck with your studies.

Alan Marsh

HMI