



Castlebrook High School A Specialist Science and Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 105363
Local Authority Bury
Inspection number 287210
Inspection date 13 September 2006
Reporting inspector John Coleman HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Parr Lane
School category	Community		Bury
Age range of pupils	11–16		Lancashire BL9 8LP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0161 7969820
Number on roll (school)	933	Fax number	0161 2527551
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs S Mason
		Headteacher	Mr M Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–16	13 September 2006	287210

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school achieved specialist status as a college of science and technology in September 2005. A purpose designed construction centre will be completed on the school site in November 2006. The headteacher took up his post on 1 September 2006. Students are mainly White British. A few are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a very small number 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: 3

Overall, Castlebrook School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. When you enter the school, the photographs of students enjoying practical work in technology bear testimony to what the school does best.

Specialist college status is broadening curriculum choices for all students. A range of options, including construction, means that students acquire skills and qualifications which are well suited to their needs and to those of the local economy. First class partnerships are established with construction companies who support students' learning with work placements and experienced tuition. An important impact of specialist status is the raising of confidence and morale in the whole school community.

There are still some barriers to further progress. High levels of staff absence, particularly of some senior teachers, have led to inconsistencies in the achievements of students in some subjects such as French, history and dual award science. There is insufficient attention paid to assessing students' attainment in subjects other than English, mathematics and science. As a result, learning is not always effectively targeted at the next step needed for students to progress. The senior leadership team has not been fully involved in the monitoring and evaluation of school improvement. School self-evaluation is satisfactory because individual faculties have an accurate view of their strengths and weaknesses, but this is not effectively shared across the school. A newly appointed headteacher, acting deputy headteacher and recently formed senior leadership team are reviewing roles and responsibilities. This is strengthening the effectiveness of management and improving communication.

Because the school provides effective support, teachers are freed from administrative tasks. The rigorous monitoring of teaching by heads of faculty has been coupled with effective training to improve lessons. Characteristics of good teaching seen by inspectors include the very good subject knowledge of staff, warm relationships between students and staff, and an extensive use of practical tasks to inspire students' interest. This good teaching has been instrumental in raising standards in many subjects. The provisional school examination results for 2006 show overall GCSE pass rates have improved over those in 2005. The school's capacity for improvement is satisfactory.

Students develop as mature, responsible young citizens learning from the very good role models provided by the dedicated staff. Behaviour in classes and around the school is generally good, and inspectors were impressed by the good attitudes of all the students they saw. Parents' questionnaires support these judgements. Whilst students are clear that they see staff as fair and approachable they are concerned that their views are not sufficiently taken into account. Parents held similar views.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in French, history and dual award science.
- Ensure that students' views are taken properly into account.
- Involve all staff in rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

- Implement assessment procedures so that all subject departments can plan the appropriate next steps in learning for students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Most students entering from primary school have standards around average and they make particularly good progress in English, mathematics and science during Key Stage 3. In the last few years the school's GCSE results have been about the national average, although students' achievements in English and mathematics have been above average. Good progress is maintained in Key Stage 4 in English and mathematics. However, progress in other subjects is more variable, and GCSE results in French, history and dual award science are below average. The school's provisional GCSE results for 2006 show that students, including those with additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities, met their targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

'Castlebrook enables students to flourish and become rounded individuals.' This opinion expressed by one parent is supported by the students themselves who spoke to the inspectors. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Students praise the range of exciting extra curricular activities which are available: they enjoy school, feel safe and behave well. They say that the little bullying and name calling that occasionally happens is dealt with well by the staff. They acquire a good knowledge about how to stay fit and healthy. Students do not feel that their views are given enough consideration, and that when their views are collated, nothing is done as a result.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students say they enjoy lessons because, 'Teachers are helpful and friendly, have a sense of humour and understand.' Good use of practical tasks makes learning interesting and this was seen in lessons where the enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff achieved strong levels of interest and very good responses from students. Teaching in the core subjects of English and mathematics is particularly effective. Teachers build systematically on what students already know and can do. As a result, students enjoy the challenge and make good progress. However, this successful practice is not consistently applied in all other subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum at Key Stage 4 includes options for students to take a dual award GCSE in information and communication technology (ICT) and construction. These options are very popular and resulted from the school's review of the curriculum that took place during the successful bid for specialist status. The school's partnership with local and national construction companies provides excellent opportunities for students to experience on-site learning. Students appreciate this broadening of choices and may now opt out of continuing with a modern foreign language. These recent changes follow a sustained period in which the school offered a very traditional choice. Extra-curricular activities are wide ranging and well attended by students. There are strong links with those primary schools from where Castlebrook students transfer.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Students feel they are part of a community and as one parent explained, 'New students slot in very well and are welcomed.' Students who need someone to turn to express confidence in knowing that adults in the school are approachable and fair. Students with additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the highest attaining students and those from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as anyone. Choices are open to all. A Castlebrook strength is the ability to include everyone. Guidance given to students in their academic studies is good in English and mathematics. However, a lack of consistently applied assessment arrangements in some other subjects hinders students' progress and contributes to lower standards in these subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Staff and students speak very positively of the immediate impact of the newly appointed headteacher. Improvements to the levels of lunchtime supervision have been achieved with the strong support of staff. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and areas which need improving, founded upon good monitoring procedures in each faculty. High levels of staff absence have contributed to a lack of coherence in the senior leadership team. The school now has an acting deputy headteacher and there are plans in place to sharpen the roles and responsibilities of the senior team. Governance is satisfactory. Governors are strong supporters of the school and are led by a well-informed chair who communicates very effectively with other governors. The governing body is too reliant upon the school for the information it receives and there are limited opportunities for governors to obtain answers independently of the school.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for talking to us about your experiences. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

- Everyone is very proud of your school's specialist status as a Science and Technology College and we think you have better choices for GCSE as a result of this.
- You achieve good standards in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is good and you enjoy lessons especially when they are practical and take notice of what you can already do.
- Your behaviour is mostly good and this helps everyone to learn in lessons.
- Your school does well to include everyone in as many activities as possible.
- You told us that not enough consideration is given to your views, and we agree.
- We have said that standards in French, history and dual award science must be improved.
- Now that you have a new headteacher we have asked him to involve all the staff in finding out about what is working well or what needs improving.
- We have asked that the school improves the ways in which it tests your knowledge and uses the results to plan what you need to learn next.

Thank you for helping us so much with the inspection of your school. We hope you will carry on enjoying learning and helping your teachers to make Castlebrook High School an even better place to learn.