



Stalham High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 121155
Local Authority NORFOLK
Inspection number 292035
Inspection dates 1–2 March 2007
Reporting inspector John Godwood

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Brumstead Road
School category	Community		Stalham, Norwich
Age range of pupils	12–16		Norfolk NR12 9DG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01692580281
Number on roll (school)	433	Fax number	01692581480
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr M Cullingham
		Headteacher	Mr J Chilvers
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
12–16	1–2 March 2007	292035

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much smaller than average. The socio-economic circumstances of the students that attend the school are broadly average, although fewer adults in the area have had higher education than is the case nationally. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is average. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is average.

The school is currently in the middle of an extensive building programme in readiness for September 2007, when its age range will be extended to include Year 7 students.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's effectiveness is satisfactory. It has improved in several ways since the last inspection. Leadership and management have been strengthened through new appointments that have led to new ideas and a more strategic approach. The range of courses offered in Years 10 and 11 is now much better suited to students' differing abilities and interests. These improvements have had a positive impact on the quality of teaching, students' attitudes and their achievement, although there remain inconsistencies and room for further improvement. The school gives satisfactory value for money and its previous designation as having serious weaknesses no longer applies.

Students' achievement is satisfactory. They reach average standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Year 9 test results show an upward trend. GCSE results have fluctuated but improved significantly in 2006 and were average. More students than is the case nationally gain at least five passes, but fewer gain the very top grades.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are generally well planned. There is much good teaching, but it is not yet sufficiently consistent in how well it is matched to students' different abilities and how well questions are used to deepen understanding. Students have regular guidance on their targets. Many students appreciate the support from their mentors and the additional help that teachers give outside lessons. However, not all students are clear about what they need to do to improve their work. The curriculum is satisfactory and students have good guidance on their future options and careers.

Although students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory, there is too much variation in their attitudes and behaviour. Most students behave well, but learning is affected by low-level disruption in a small minority of lessons and teachers are not consistent in the standards of behaviour they expect. There is also some inconsiderate behaviour around the school. However, many students make a good contribution to the school and wider community, through supporting younger students with their reading, for example, or on the school council.

Parents have mixed views about the school. Some are particularly pleased with the level of care and the support from some teachers; others are concerned about inconsistencies in behaviour management and what they feel are low aspirations. The improvements over the last two years show that the school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The senior leadership team and governors are highly motivated to move the school forward and have some imaginative and exciting plans. However, there is not yet a clearly articulated vision for the future of the school that will raise aspirations and form a basis for planning key steps. Self-evaluation is satisfactory and the school has sound procedures for checking students' progress and the quality of teaching in departments. However, the school does not check sufficiently the impact of initiatives on the overall quality of teaching and learning and students' personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Put together an ambitious central vision for the future of the school and set clear targets to work towards it.
- Set high expectations of students' attitudes and behaviour and reinforce these consistently.
- Improve teaching so that it is more consistently good, particularly in matching the work to students' abilities and ensuring that they know what to do to improve.
- Monitor carefully the impact of initiatives on the quality of students' learning and their personal development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average. They make satisfactory progress and achieve average standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Year 9 test results are average, and have been higher in the last three years than they were previously. English results show a steady improvement; mathematics and science also improved in 2006. However, the school's challenging Year 9 targets were not quite met, especially in mathematics. Progress is better in English than in the other two subjects. There is no difference between the progress of girls and boys.

GCSE results in 2006 were average, having improved significantly from 2005. The students had higher starting points, but nevertheless progress improved and was satisfactory. The proportion who gained five or more passes was above average. However, the proportion of A and A* grades was below average. Progress in English was exceptionally low in 2005, but improved a lot in 2006. Students did relatively well in science and geography but less well in French and physical education. The school met its Year 11 targets, although these were not especially demanding. The targets set for 2008 are more challenging. Boys and lower attaining students did less well than others, especially in English. This was partly due to the curriculum, which has since been improved. Students with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress. The school's own records show that standards in the current Year 11 are a little lower than they were last year, but that students are making satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Although many students are well behaved and have positive attitudes, a minority disrupt the learning of others in some lessons, and this is not consistently followed up by staff. Some older students behave inconsiderately around school towards younger ones, although none feel that their safety is compromised. Students do feel, however, that any cases of bullying will be taken seriously and acted upon. Students' enjoyment of school is broadly satisfactory.

The school is working hard to improve attendance, which is satisfactory, and this continues to be a priority for development. Good attendance is recognised by rewards and certificates and a display in the school entrance.

Students develop a satisfactory understanding of spiritual, ethical and cultural issues. Their appreciation of cultural diversity is developed particularly in religious education and through assemblies, in which students are introduced to different faiths. Students respond generously to charity appeals and enjoy taking part in fund-raising events, such as a talent contest to support the Norfolk Air Ambulance. The school council plays a good role in contributing to improvements in the school environment. Students were instrumental in developing a garden out of a piece of derelict land, and are keenly promoting a campaign to cut down on paper waste.

Students are aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles, although there is a mixed response to the more healthy options available at lunchtime. They develop satisfactory skills in preparation for their future lives, and the fortnight's work experience in Year 10 makes an important contribution to this.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons thoughtfully, relate well with their students and are keen to help and encourage them. Students mainly enjoy lessons, especially when good subject knowledge enables teachers to enthuse them and set them challenging and sometimes exciting tasks, and when they adapt these to match different abilities. In good lessons teachers facilitate independent learning and, by their skilful questioning, help students to deepen their understanding, think around a topic or work out things for themselves. However, the quality of teaching is not sufficiently consistent with regard to such characteristics. Where, as in a few lessons, teachers' questions are of a routine kind that allow students to be largely passive, or where they give tasks that are mundane, students become bored and make little progress.

Standards of marking vary but, at best, teachers mark work promptly and write concise and constructive comments. Older students are more aware than younger ones of their academic targets, but many students are vague about what they need to do specifically to improve. Information and communication technology (ICT) is sometimes used effectively but is unavailable in a few classrooms. While students' attitudes are mostly positive and teachers generally manage students' behaviour well, in a small proportion of lessons, disruptive behaviour by some students obstructs others' learning. Lesson observation is well established and valuable to teachers, but does not yet provide a consistent benchmark of quality.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. In Years 8 and 9, students benefit from learning drama. In Years 10 and 11, they have a satisfactory range of options. These are well matched to their interests and abilities through being arranged in four pathways that include additional challenge for higher attaining students, vocational courses at college and work-related learning for lower attaining students.

The curriculum has significantly improved since the last inspection. The Key Stage 4 pathways have had a positive effect on students' motivation and preparation for work, although it is too early to see the impact on examination results. All statutory requirements are now met, but too little time is allocated to religious education and citizenship in Year 10, and to physical education in Year 11.

The provision for students with learning difficulties is satisfactory. Curriculum planning is imaginative and includes satisfactory enrichment for the most able students. The school makes good use of its links with the local college and middle school to develop the curriculum, such as the French course leading to early entry GCSE. There is satisfactory enrichment through trips and a limited range of extra-curricular activities, with strengths in sport and drama.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support. Academic monitoring is satisfactory. Students' progress is tracked regularly, and mentoring meetings between staff, students and their parents contribute to students' achievement. This arrangement works well for some students, who feel that they are well known by their academic mentors, but others feel less well supported. The school keeps parents regularly informed about their child's progress through reports that include attainment grades. Some subjects spell out clearly what students need to do to improve, but others only offer general advice.

Vulnerable students are monitored carefully and child protection measures are robust. There is a high priority on safety during the current buildings expansion and students are regularly informed about necessary changes on site. Liaison with the local first and middle schools is good and helps to create a smooth transition. Students with learning difficulties are well served by learning support assistants when they are present in lessons. The school has effective relationships with outside agencies which provide good help to individual students when they can, although some services are stretched. There is particularly good guidance on further education and careers that helps students to make informed choices.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher and senior leadership team - two of them recently appointed and bringing in new ideas - have a good understanding of the school's main strengths and weaknesses. They give sound direction on how the school should move forward, and they have used the support from the local authority well to successfully remove the weaknesses found in the last inspection. Both staff and governors are excited about the school's potential to improve on the basis of its forthcoming expansion, with improved buildings and additional staff. However, senior leaders have not yet fashioned a simple, central vision to act as an inspirational focus for staff and students and a basis for planning key steps.

Since the last inspection the headteacher has sensibly delegated more to his senior colleagues and is taking a more strategic view. He has devolved more authority to subject leaders, for instance in how their departments are evaluated. Subject leaders are developing well and are committed to the school's priorities for improving teaching and raising achievement. Several initiatives are successfully promoting the sharing of good practice in teaching and there is some evidence of better achievement as a result of improved lesson planning. However, leaders do not monitor sufficiently the impact of initiatives on, for example, students' behaviour or the overall quality of teaching and learning as a basis for further planning. The school is seeking to raise gradually its students' academic sights and is at the stage of setting them realistic, if not overly ambitious, academic goals.

Governance has improved and is satisfactory, as governors are increasingly assuming a more strategic and constructively critical role. They undertake training and, by linking with departments, are involving themselves more effectively in the work 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	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
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	3
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

5 March 2007

Dear Students

Stalham High School, Brumstead Road, Stalham, Norfolk NR12 9DG

Thank you for your help when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you and visiting your lessons and other activities. Both you and your teachers are working in very difficult circumstances while the building works take place, but you are coping with this well and it will be worth it in the end. Several of you told us that you had seen other improvements, such as in behaviour. We agree that the school has improved in many ways.

Many of you behave well and are helpful to others. We were pleased to see the good work of the school council and other ways that you make a contribution, such as through the reading challenge. However, behaviour is not consistently good. A few lessons are disrupted and there is some inconsiderate behaviour around school. We have asked the school to make the expectations of behaviour very clear and enforce them consistently.

Your progress is satisfactory overall and standards are average. Progress has improved partly through the introduction of pathways in Years 10 and 11, which provide courses that generally suit your interests and abilities well. There are good extra-curricular activities in sport and drama. You have good guidance on your options and careers.

The teaching is satisfactory overall. There are many good lessons, and you told us that you appreciate the extra help that many teachers provide. However, not all lessons are so good. Many of you find the target setting meetings helpful but you do not all feel so well supported. We have asked the school to make sure that the work in lessons is matched to your abilities and that you know specifically what you need to do to meet your targets.

The senior staff and governors have worked hard to improve the school and it is now satisfactory. However, it could be better still. We have asked the school's leaders to set out a clear vision for the future and to check that the improvements they plan really benefit your learning and your enjoyment of school. We think that the school has the capacity to improve further. You can help through behaving considerately to others and working with your teachers to meet your individual targets.

We wish you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Godwood

Lead inspector