

The Blyth-Jex School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121176
Local Authority	NORFOLK
Inspection number	292042
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	12–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	891
6th form	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Keith Crocker
Headteacher	Ms K Topping
Date of previous school inspection	3 March 2003
School address	St Clement's Hill Norwich Norfolk NR3 4BX
Telephone number	01603411721
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Age group	12–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Blyth-Jex school is an average sized comprehensive school with 891 students in the main school and a further 114 in The Kett Sixth Form, which operates collaboratively with Heartsease High school and Sprowston High school. Students currently join the school in Year 8 although reorganisation this year will see the first intake of students into Year 7. The school operates on two sites but plans are in place to bring all provision onto a single site in 2008. The majority of pupils comes from areas with significant social and economic deprivation. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and the number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, are much higher than the local and national average. A small but increasing number of students comes from minority ethnic backgrounds and does not have English as a first language. The school is under-subscribed and a small but significant number of students joins the school at times other than at the start of the school year. The school became a specialist college for business and enterprise in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Blyth-Jex School is an effective school that provides a satisfactory education for its students. Its specialism in business and enterprise is helping to raise achievement in business studies, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), and forge stronger links with its local community. In 2006 it was recognised by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust as one of its most improving schools for that year.

Standards on entry in Year 8 are well below the national average. By the end of Year 9 and Year 11, standards are below average overall and students' achievement is satisfactory. Performance is stronger in Years 10 and 11 than it is in Years 8 and 9, although standards achieved in Key Stages 3 and 4 are variable. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2006 were below the national average in English and science but better in maths and close to average. Students do better in Key Stage 4 and last year's GCSE results were the highest ever achieved by the school. Almost half of students gained five or more A* to C grades and over a third of them achieved five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics.

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Attendance is broadly average and continues to be an area the school monitors closely. Many students are well behaved and display positive attitudes, but a significant minority disrupts the learning of others when lessons fail to stimulate interest or when teachers do not manage behaviour consistently. Students' lack of basic literacy and oracy skills contributes to this because they find learning in some lessons too difficult to understand. Exclusion rates are decreasing as a result of new internal arrangements to retain challenging students in school.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school's mixed-age tutor groups and 'learning communities' encourage older students to look after younger ones. Vulnerable students are monitored carefully and child protection measures are robust. Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities has improved and is now satisfactory. The school is working effectively with a range of partners to support students. Students develop a satisfactory understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues through assemblies and tutorials. They know about the importance of healthy eating and adopting active lifestyles.

Inspectors agree with the school's view that the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The school has vigorously recruited new teachers, including advanced skills teachers, to strengthen some subjects and spread good practice. Teachers track students' progress effectively and use this information to set targets, but not all teachers explain to individuals exactly what they have to do to improve their work and achieve higher grades. A satisfactory curriculum includes academic and vocational courses and requires all students to learn about business and the world of work in Key Stage 4. Students generally enjoy school but request that more curriculum enrichment activities are provided outside of school hours.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has led the school through a period of significant change and development including acquiring specialist status and in securing the commitment of the local authority to move the school onto a single site. She and her senior managers have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and demonstrate good capacity to improve further. Faculty heads and community managers are improving the monitoring of students' progress and providing challenge and support for the teachers they manage, but these procedures are not yet firmly embedded. Governors

discharge their duties effectively and ensure that resources are deployed effectively to achieve satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points, which are lower than average. They make satisfactory progress on advanced-level courses although results are below average. They achieve better outcomes in vocational courses, where results are similar to the national average. In 2006, a significant proportion of students did not achieve as well as they could have done but action has been taken to improve this and progress is now satisfactory. Students' personal development and well being are satisfactory. Students are well behaved but they have few opportunities to learn independently and there are insufficient opportunities to develop leadership skills.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory although a few inconsistencies remain in some subjects. A good curriculum enables students to select from an extensive range of academic and vocational courses. However, there are not enough opportunities for enrichment. Satisfactory care, guidance and support ensure that students receive regular advice about careers, and support is available from teachers and learning mentors. Leadership and management in the sixth form are satisfactory. The director and head of the sixth form centre ensure that students' choice of course is well informed and coordinated. The monitoring of students' progress to encourage good achievement is insufficient.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' literacy and oracy in all key stages to ensure they feel confident, are able to articulate their views and can aspire in lessons to achieve their very best.
- Apply consistent approaches to behaviour management in lessons and improve students' attitudes towards learning so that they can work independently for sustained periods.
- Improve teaching and learning by making sure students know exactly what to do to improve their work in order to attain higher grades.
- Improve the tracking and monitoring by teachers and managers of the progress made by individual students in the sixth form, and ensure that the tracking and monitoring procedures in the main school are firmly embedded.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Standards in English are below the national average. Results in last year's national tests at the end of Year 9 fell and did not meet the school's own targets. Results in science improved slightly when compared with the previous year but remain below average. Mathematics standards are consistently strong and results compare very favourably with those achieved in similar schools. Standards in Key Stage 4 are below what is achieved nationally, although the school exceeded its targets for adding value to students' achievements and GCSE examination results improved significantly in 2006. In 2006, 44% of students gained five or more GCSE A* to C grades and 36% of students achieved five or more good GCSE grades including English and maths. The proportion of students achieving five or

more GCSE A* to G grades was close to the national average and almost all students achieved at least one GCSE qualification. Students achieve well in many lessons, but this is not consistent in all subjects or from year to year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students generally enjoy school and behave satisfactorily, but a minority is inclined to disrupt others in lessons. This is often because there is too little consistency in how teachers manage behaviour and only a few teachers refer to the students' code of conduct. Students feel that any cases of bullying will be taken seriously and acted upon. Exclusion rates are decreasing as a result of new school internal arrangements and the school is becoming more proficient at keeping students in school and re-integrating them into lessons. The school successfully strives to improve attendance, which has improved to be average. The school council feel that their views are taken seriously and confirm that the school has acted on their recommendations, such as providing some common rooms and encouraging the safety of cyclists. Students respond generously to charity appeals but only a few get involved with community activities. Students are aware of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and many eat well and participate in sport at lunchtimes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers apply their good subject knowledge to plan lessons that include clear objectives and a range of activities which are suitably matched to meet most students' learning needs. Teaching assistants provide valuable support to pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Where ICT is used, it is used well, but it is not used often enough by students and opportunities to support and reinforce their literacy and numeracy skills are not planned in all subjects. There is too little consistency to the way teachers manage behaviour in order to ensure that all students can learn effectively throughout the lesson. Very few lessons include opportunities for students to work by themselves for sustained periods of time. The school has improved procedures for monitoring the quality of lessons and its self-evaluation shows that it has a good understanding of the effectiveness of teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory, with strengths in Key Stage 4. It is increasingly flexible in order to meet the needs of all of its students, including those not suited to studying GCSE courses. Options in Key Stage 4 include a range of subjects linked to business and enterprise, as well as a growing range of vocational courses in partnership with local colleges and training providers. Work-related learning is a strong aspect of the curriculum but students consider that the range of enrichment activities is limited. The school has recently appointed

a literacy coordinator to improve students' literacy and oracy but it is too soon to judge the impact of this on raising standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support. An increasing range of data is used to track students' progress and managers and teachers are becoming more familiar with how to use this information. Most pupils know how well they are performing, but not all teachers guide students as to how they can improve the quality of their work and attain higher grades. Communication with parents and carers has improved through increasing use of regular, short reports on their children's progress and is now good. Effective liaison between the school and the local middle schools helps to create a smooth transition when students arrive. The school is inclusive and is working with a range of external services to provide satisfactory care for students at risk of exclusion by tailoring learning to match their specific needs. A case worker funded jointly by the Connexions service and the YMCA provides particularly good support for needy and vulnerable students, but some other external support services are in great demand and are not always available. The school has effective arrangements to ensure students' safety when they move between sites.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The leadership of the headteacher is good and her strategic leadership is strong. The headteacher has devolved responsibility for key areas of improvement to an enhanced senior leadership team. Governors display a satisfactory understanding of the main issues facing the school. Newly appointed teachers, faculty heads and community managers have increased the school's capacity to improve further, with the result that capacity in the main school is now good. The school has allocated significant resources so teachers can benefit from further professional development. Self-evaluation is good and informs development planning to bring about improvement. Monitoring of performance is satisfactory. Managers use data satisfactorily to measure students' progress and monitor their welfare to reduce the likelihood of students underachieving, but the monitoring procedures are not yet fully embedded. ICT is not used effectively in all subjects because some staff do not have the confidence to use it on a regular basis.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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	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	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
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	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	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

23 March 2007

Dear Students

The Blyth-Jex High School, St Clement's Hill, Norwich, NR3 4BX

Recently I visited your school and found it to be satisfactory. Your input was vital in helping me make this judgement, so thank you for allowing me to join you in lessons, talk with you and look at some of your work. I also spent time with some of your teachers, met with governors and read many letters from parents.

I was particularly impressed with how the school is using business and enterprise to raise standards in subjects such as business and communication, mathematics and ICT, and to provide you with the skills you will need for further education or the world of work. The school takes care of you and provides some enrichment activities particularly in sport, but many of you said you would like more things to do at lunchtimes.

I found that results were better in 2006 and that most of you are making satisfactory progress this year but there is still more that you can achieve. Therefore I have asked your senior teachers to make these improvements:

- Improve your literacy and oracy skills so you become confident, articulate learners who can achieve your very best.
- Manage behaviour in lessons with greater consistency and encourage you to become more independent learners.
- Improve teaching and learning by making sure you all know exactly what to do to improve your work and attain higher standards.
- Continue to track and monitor your individual progress in all years at the school to help you achieve more.

You can help your school by attending regularly and behaving well. Also, use your student council to share your views with senior staff about what further improvements you would like to see and what you can do to help. I wish you every success in the future.

John Mitcheson Her Majesty's Inspector.