

The John Bentley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126501
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	293578
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Tom Winskill HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1236
6th form	141
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Teresa Quinn
Headteacher	Gordon Trafford
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002
School address	Calne Wiltshire SN11 8YH
Telephone number	01249 818100
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Age group	11–18
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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

This large specialist language and training school serves the town of Calne and the surrounding rural area. The students are almost all of White British heritage. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is above the national average. The school has specific provision for students with dyslexia.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school providing good quality care and education for its students. Standards across the school are broadly average and achievement is good as a result of the powerful combination of good teaching and clear academic guidance for individual students. Initiatives by the senior leadership team, based on the outcomes of self-evaluation, have improved teaching and learning, the curriculum and provision in the sixth form. In turn these are bringing about improvements in achievement and standards. This is in spite of recent changes of staff in key areas, including English, support for students with learning difficulties and the sixth form. The school's detailed, rigorous and continuous process of self-evaluation enables senior and middle leaders, together with governors, to have a well honed understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

In English, lack of direction as a result of uncertainties in the leadership of the subject and inconsistent teaching have led to a decline in standards and progress in Key Stage 3. In 2006, GCSE results in English improved although progress was below expected levels. These problems are being tackled effectively such that standards and progress are now satisfactory. Many of the improvements, however, are not fully embedded and have yet to be sustained to bring about good progress. Teaching and learning are good. They are not of a consistently high standard and there is variation in quality both between and within subjects. Where teaching is less effective, this is usually because learning activities are not matched well enough to students' needs. The school's training school status is contributing effectively to improving the quality of teaching and learning through well planned professional development for staff. The school's specialist language status enhances the curriculum and provides a strong international impetus for much of the school's work. As a result, students' understanding of different cultures is outstanding.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy school and their behaviour is good although a minority of parents expressed some concerns. Parents rightly have confidence in the school. Students speak highly of the school, where they feel safe, are well cared for and have good opportunities to develop healthy lifestyles. Care, guidance and support are good, and as one parent accurately and eloquently commented, 'Our child is very happy at John Bentley. We are confident that the school strives to provide the best care, support and guidance to help our child face and cope with the challenges presented during the secondary phase of his education.' Effective support and guidance ensure students with learning difficulties make good progress including those in the unit providing for students with dyslexia.

Curriculum provision is good and meets the needs of students. However, students' preparation for the workplace or further education and training is satisfactory because their literacy skills are satisfactory rather than good. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides good leadership and makes effective use of the relative strengths of his able senior team to bring about improvement. The excellent governing body plays an integral part in the work of the school and sets out clear inclusive values which permeate much of its practice.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The inclusive sixth form is good and enables students to achieve and develop well. Standards attained at advanced level in 2006 were in line with national averages. Students following

Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national certificate courses make good progress. Those on advanced courses in drama, art and German make good progress. Progress in other subjects is satisfactory with none inadequate. A strong feature is the good progress made by students in critical thinking, an advanced course followed by most students in Year 12. Curriculum provision is good. Choices available match the differing aspirations of students. Students themselves say that they enjoy the sixth form. Many take advantage of the leadership opportunities offered by the enrichment programme. They value the excellent relationships with teachers and the good individual guidance they receive. Good sixth form teaching is characterised by high expectations, good subject knowledge and an appropriate level of challenge. This sustains students' motivation and raises their self-confidence and enables them to achieve well. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, focusing on improving achievement. For example, students appreciate the rigorous system for monitoring their progress. They have challenging targets and most know what they have to do to achieve them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in English by developing and maintaining high quality teaching and learning in both Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Ensure progress is good in all subjects by ensuring that teaching and learning are of consistently high quality and meet the needs of all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The 2006 GCSE results were broadly average, including in the specialist school subjects of French and German. The percentage of students gaining five GCSEs, including English and mathematics, at grade C or above was in line with the national average. It improved from below average in 2005. Standards have risen and are now broadly average because the school analysed the needs of the students and provided, together with improved teaching and learning, a curriculum which better met their needs. At Key Stage 3, national test results in 2006 were below average overall. This is because test results in English were below average, offsetting average results in mathematics and science. Standards in English at Key Stage 3 had declined steadily since 2002. The decline has been tackled through a much stronger and clearer focus on raising standards as a result of improvement in the leadership and management of English. Consequently, standards in English are now in line with national expectations.

In the academic year 2005-06, progress in Key Stage 4 overall was satisfactory. Although many students made good progress, a small minority underachieved. Students currently in Key Stage 4, whose attainment on entry was below average, are making good progress towards challenging targets. This is because there have been further improvements to the curriculum and teaching and learning. In addition, target setting for individual students and closer monitoring and tracking of their progress ensure underachievement is identified and tackled. At Key Stage 3 progress in mathematics and science has been consistently good for at least three years and remains so. Progress in English is satisfactory and improving. In both key stages, students are making good progress in lessons and standards are now average. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress as a result of well targeted support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Students are confident and display mature attitudes to their work and to each other. They are considerate and behave well in lessons and around the school. Students adopt safe and healthy lifestyles and many participate in sport. They are able to talk to trusted adults and consider that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good, and their cultural development is outstanding. For example, they reflect deeply on the importance of beliefs in different cultures and inequalities in countries such as Britain and India. Students also organise and contribute well to social events in school and in the community and raise funds for charity. They particularly enjoy participating in sporting fixtures, drama productions, multicultural days and visits to other countries. Students contribute positively to school initiatives such as recycling. They have a strong voice in the school through the class, year and school councils. Students are involved in community placements including local primary schools and care homes for the elderly. They acquire some good work-place skills although their literacy skills are satisfactory. They develop personal qualities which augur well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Typically teaching is good and provides a variety of interesting learning activities which are well matched to the needs of the students. They engage readily with these tasks and are generally well motivated. As a result students make good progress in lessons. There are good relationships between students and teachers. Information and communication technology (ICT) improves the learning experience for students but its effective use is not yet widespread. In some lessons, students assess their work and that of their peers so they have a clearer idea of what they need to do to improve. Where teaching is most effective, students participate fully in the lessons, work well in groups and are stretched using a variety of learning strategies. As a result they make rapid and occasionally outstanding progress. Where teaching is less effective, time is not always used productively and the tasks do not challenge the students sufficiently. As result progress in such lessons is satisfactory rather than good. Teaching assistants are used effectively to increase students' progress. They enable students, including those with learning difficulties, to concentrate well and develop their understanding of the work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of its students. A wide variety of courses are offered at both GCSE and in the sixth form. The school has altered the Key Stage 4 curriculum in response to the changing learning needs and interests of the students. It is now more relevant to groups and individuals with differing career aspirations. Important features of this are the increased number of vocational courses, improved provision

for more able students and closer working with local partners to enhance and complement the school's provision. These changes have helped raise standards as students are well motivated and enjoy the new courses. The school provides good opportunities for all students above Year 7 to develop an understanding of the world of work. The curriculum is enhanced by a rich and diverse programme of extra-curricular activities which students enjoy. These opportunities are invaluable in building good relationships between the students themselves, teachers and the wider community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides good quality care, guidance and support. Form tutors and guidance leaders monitor students' academic and personal development, and ensure they receive appropriate support. Individual students are set challenging targets by subject teachers and form tutors. The latter meet with students individually twice a year to discuss the level of work they have achieved. This effective guidance helps students achieve well. The progress of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is closely monitored. This helps the school identify effective support, for example in the unit for dyslexic students or in reading tuition. This in turn ensures students with learning difficulties make good progress. Students' personal development is enhanced by a good programme of personal, social and health education. The arrangements for health and safety are good and child protection procedures are secure. Careers advice is satisfactory although older students would value more specific careers guidance. Good links with partner primary schools ensure that students settle into the school quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has built a strong senior leadership team. They work closely with subject and guidance leaders, who also make strong contributions to whole-school planning, decision making and self-evaluation. School leaders communicate well with staff, parents and students and have created a shared ethos where students feel valued and secure. The inclusion of all students is central to this ethos. School leaders work closely with the governing body. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, ask searching questions to hold the school to account and help shape the school's plans. Consequently, governance is outstanding.

The school actively seeks the views of parents about what goes on in school. It has listened to and acted on the views of students in improving teaching and learning and involves them in the appointment of new staff. There are good links with partner schools through the school's specialist status, its extended school cluster and other external agencies. The school collects a great deal of information through rigorous performance analysis and monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning. This is used effectively to set challenging targets and to monitor students' progress. The current school transformation plan is cumbersome and not sufficiently sharply focused. Improvements since the last inspection include the increased delegation to middle leaders and much more rigorous self-evaluation. These, together with the improvements

in standards already made, show that the school has a good capacity to improve further. The school provides good value for money.

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Annex A

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?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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	3	3
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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	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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

27 April 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of John Bentley School, Calne, SN11 8YH

We inspected your school recently and this letter summarises our findings. We are grateful to the students we met in lessons, around the school and in meetings, for helping with the inspection. John Bentley is a good school where students achieve well and where standards are rising. There have been some problems in English but these are being dealt with and students are making satisfactory progress. There is a lot of good teaching although this is better in some subjects than in others. You know what you are trying to achieve and how to improve the quality of your work.

You are well cared for and your behaviour is good. You tell us you enjoy school and feel safe there. You like the improvements to the curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, as it now provides the sorts of courses which interest and motivate you. You get on well with your teachers which helps your learning. You also help improve the school through voicing your opinions in the school council, helping teachers improve their work and helping the school make teaching appointments. All of these can help the school tackle the improvements we have asked them to make. These are:

- Make sure that all teaching and learning in English is of high quality and concentrates on helping you to improve your standard of English. This is so you are even better prepared for life outside John Bentley and so you can achieve high standards in tests and examinations.
- Work to improve teaching and learning so that it is as good in every subject in future as it is in the best now.

I wish you well, particularly those of you with tests and examinations in the near future. Tom Winskill Her Majesty's Inspector