

The Bishop's Stortford High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117577
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312659
Inspection date	15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1078
6th form	318
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Rodney Stock
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Goulding
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
School address	London Road Bishop's Stortford CM23 3LU
Telephone number	01279 868686
Fax number	01279 868687

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- How effectively is students' achievement evaluated and monitored across subjects?
- How effective are leadership and management at all levels in ensuring the students' maximum progress?
- How well the school's mathematics and computing specialism assists in raising standards?

Evidence was gathered from the school's self evaluation, by observing lessons, scrutinising the school's records of students' standards and achievement and other documentation, and by discussions with students and staff. Parents' responses to questionnaires also informed judgements. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in the self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Bishop's Stortford High School, a specialist mathematics and computing school, serves communities with mainly favourable socio-economic backgrounds. Very few students are eligible for a free school meal. The overwhelming majority of students are from White European backgrounds. Of the broadly average proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, none is at the early stages of learning English. A much lower than average proportion of the students has difficulties with their learning or behaviour. The school is part of a local consortium of Further Education Colleges and schools, providing vocational options for the 14 to 18 age range. Girls are admitted to the sixth form. The school has received a number of awards, including those for 'Healthy Schools', 'Eco Schools,' the ICT Mark and BECTA Excellence Award for leadership and management in ICT.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Bishop's Stortford High School (TBSHS) is an outstanding mathematics and computing school that determinedly seeks to offer its students a 'truly all-round education.' Students believe that the school 'ensures they do their best.' The overwhelming majority of parents also agree that this high performing school supports its students very well. 'We are so happy with the school. My son really enjoys attending classes which is something I never thought to see.' These views match closely the school's own evaluation of its provision. Some parents, however, are concerned about past turbulence in staffing. This occurred mainly in science and the school has now resolved this issue successfully. Of the parents who returned questionnaires, around a quarter dislike the current arrangements for the academic review days as they believe students lose valuable school time. However, the school's returns from the actual events indicate an overall high level of parental satisfaction with the reviews.

At the heart of the school's sustained success since the previous very positive inspection is the genuine desire to keep improving. Well-established structures and procedures support the school's rigorous evaluation of its work. This exceptional mathematics and computing school keeps the students' achievements central to its endeavours and standards are high. It has improved behaviour significantly over recent years. Teachers and support staff alike show high levels of commitment to training and to involvement in action research projects with adjacent universities. The school has used its specialist status well to develop high levels of technical expertise in information and communications technology (ICT). Staff use ICT imaginatively and creatively in lessons and enhanced already very good teaching to outstanding. The school has demonstrated clearly its very strong capacity to improve further.

Students achieve exceptionally well in both the main school and in the sixth form. In most year groups, the majority of students enter the school with high starting points. Over 80% of students, almost double that nationally, regularly gain five or more higher GCSE grades that include English and mathematics. For a few cohorts, however, such as the GCSE group of 2007, attainment was no higher than above average in Year 7. This accounts for the apparent slight dip in Year 11 results, which were also unduly affected by a number of long-term absentees. Additionally, the school's published results did not include the ICT accreditation successfully gained by all students prior to Year 11. Almost nine out of 10 of the current Year 11 have already achieved grade C or better in their science modular examinations. Others, too, have gained higher GCSE mathematics grades. Besides well above average achievement in the specialist subjects of mathematics and ICT, students made excellent progress in the humanities and in music technology. Younger students, too, achieve exceptionally well in national tests in English, mathematics and science. In 2007, Year 9 achieved well above average results, which were more than double the national figures in the highest levels available. In ICT, three quarters of these students exceeded the expectations typical for their age. Post-16 students also made rapid progress in advanced courses. Despite these well above average results, the proportion of students gaining overall GCSE A* and A grades is just under a third of most year groups. The school acknowledges that this should be higher.

The personal development of the students along with their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is outstanding because of high quality care, guidance and support. All students much enjoy school and this is reflected in their exemplary behaviour, regular attendance and in their willingness to shoulder responsibilities. The mutual trust and respect between students, and between students and staff, are strong. Students are confident that any untoward incidents

are attended to rapidly. They are pleased that they have the 'active listener' students who also support when necessary. As a result, students flourish in a safe and secure environment. The majority of students are committed to leading healthy life styles. Participation in the 49 after-school activities is high. Many increasingly enjoy the nutritious lunchtime salads and breakfast fruits and confidently make use of the stress management sessions when needed.

The well-established school council provides a ready forum for students to air their views and findings. They have been effective in making improvements to the school. For example, Year 11 now has a social area as a result of students' requests. Students are high in their praise of the many cultural visits and overseas journeys open to them. In addition, in music technology students study the structures of traditional Indian music. Within the school community, students make a difference to others as prefects, counsellors for younger students, and house and sports leaders. They are generous in their work for charities at home and abroad. Many regularly help locally with art, ICT and farming at a centre for those with epilepsy. Overseas links include an orphanage in Mexico, where students help in the refurbishment and work with the young people. Students are exceptionally well prepared for their future economic well-being through their very positive academic achievements but also through the excellent business links, the result of the school's specialist status.

Besides excellent personal guidance, students also benefit greatly from extensive academic guidance and receive very good feedback on their class and homework. This is an important characteristic of the much good and better teaching in many subject areas. Maintaining this high quality is central to the school's development planning. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and personal enjoyment of their subjects foster real enthusiasm in students and nurture their genuine desire to learn. Challenging questioning and the considered use of students' answers engage students very well in the best lessons. Teachers use ICT resources very effectively to demonstrate concepts imaginatively and model work effectively. The wide-ranging and engaging curriculum provides excellent progression pathways and appropriate work-related activities from Year 9.

The innovative and outstanding leadership and management of the school is reflected in the headteacher and senior team's able and rigorous identification of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The students' sustained success in all areas of school life over many years owes much to senior leaders' very strong drive for improvement. Committed middle leaders, supported by well-targeted training, drive the school's ambitious programmes within their subject areas. A real sense of urgency characterises the work of most departments. Governance has improved and is now good. Under their recently re-constituted committee structure, governors are able to challenge the school more effectively by evaluating progress towards planned outcomes. They play a vital part in the strategic planning for the future of the school. Governors are especially active in recruiting staff and in exit interviews for staff moving on.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form at 'TBSHS' is outstanding as a result of excellent leadership and management. The performance of the students has risen year-on-year and many of them are successful in accessing the universities of their choice. The school is determined to develop well-rounded young people. Standards are high and students achieve exceptionally well, meeting their challenging academic targets. Particularly successful subjects include music technology, religious studies, history, government and politics, English literature and mathematics, reflecting the school's specialist status. More than 90% of students continue their studies at university.

Sixth formers new to the school are inducted well so that they quickly feel they belong. They praise the care and support that responds so readily to their needs. Close monitoring of their work and social development ensures they reach their goals. Their personal development is outstanding. Students are very proud of their school and present themselves well, showing a mature and responsible approach to school life. As form prefects, counsellors and organisers of events, they play a full part in school life and in the wider community.

Careful planning and intellectual challenge characterise the outstanding teaching and learning in the sixth form. Students speak highly of the time and effort staff give both to additional learning support and to organising and running the many sports and other activities. The curriculum is excellent with a wide range of advanced courses that meet the needs and aspirations of most students. This range is expanded helpfully by local consortium arrangements. For a small number of students, the school has revised its vocational and applied courses to match their learning styles better. Citizenship involves all students well in an impressive range of enrichment activities, including well-known visiting speakers from the world of business, theatre and politics.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the overall proportion of the students gaining A* and A grades.

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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	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	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

16 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Bishop's Stortford High School, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 3LU

After our visit to 'TBSHS', we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your exceptionally friendly welcome and for taking the time to talk to us. You tell us you are proud of your school and that you think it is 'great'. We agree with you. 'TBSHS' is an outstanding school. We are very pleased that you enjoy it so much, attend regularly, and make the most of the wide opportunities available to you. You are very appreciative not only of the engaging teaching, but you are also keen on sport, music, drama and the wide range of visits both at home and abroad.

The school looks after you exceptionally well. You tell us you feel safe and that there is always someone to turn to when you need help. You speak highly of your teachers' readiness to assist you. Many of you make a difference to your peers through the school council, through house duties and through the 'active listener' scheme. Because of the hard work of your excellent headteacher, very committed staff and governors, you are achieving exceptionally well. This opens the door to a wide range of further educational and training opportunities both at Year 11 and at the end of the sixth form.

Because you cooperate so well with what your school is trying to do for you, we are convinced that you will continue to support your teachers' efforts and go from strength to strength in developing your personal skills as well as your academic prowess. We have asked your teachers to make sure that all of you who possibly can get the very highest GCSE A* and A grades. For your part, you can do your best with your study time between now and the examinations to help bring this about.

We wish you and 'TBSHS' a very successful future.

Sheila Nolan

Lead inspector