

Bitterne Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116458
Local Authority	Southampton
Inspection number	326399
Inspection date	29 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1396
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Angela Whettingsteel
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Trigger
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Copsewood Road Bitterne Park Southampton SO18 1BU
Telephone number	02380 325 200
Fax number	02380 325 222

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The team evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, the impact of leadership and management on ensuring lower-attaining students make good progress within the school and the role of specialist status to enhance learning and raise standards.

They gathered evidence from interviews with governors, staff and students, lesson observations, analysis of documentation and observations of the school during the working day. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the team found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Bitterne Park is a large school where almost all students are from a White British background, although the proportion of students from different ethnic backgrounds is increasing. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The school was designated a performing arts school in 2004 and a High Performing Specialist School in June 2007, and gained applied learning specialism in April 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The vibrancy and highly motivating ethos of the school strike you as soon as you enter the grounds and the classroom practice continues the strong sense of purpose and commitment from all students and staff. The enjoyment of performing arts is immediately evident from the many displays that record the very good work of students in different types of performance. Students are very eager to describe how they have been involved and how they have worked with different elements of the local community, for example local primary schools and elderly resident centres. This continues to be an outstanding school. The very strong senior leadership and management would not allow any less, and the commitment to carry on improving ensures that areas of underperformance are quickly and effectively remedied.

The school has been particularly successful in raising the proportion of students who gain five or more GCSE passes at A* to C, including mathematics and English. In the last three years this proportion has increased by 15 percentage points, to 61 per cent. Standards are above average and students made good progress from the time they started at the school. Progress and achievement are judged as good and not outstanding because in previous years some students have not achieved as well as they could. The performance of lower-attaining students appeared to have dropped. These students were doing well in GCSE mathematics and English and developing very good life skills, especially in subjects such as horticulture, but these did not always provide opportunities for appropriate accreditation. This has changed so that now students are to be entered for GCSEs or other recognised qualifications when appropriate. For example, students were observed working on GCSE photography coursework. They enjoyed the challenges of complex techniques and produced some intricate prints, many of them preferring to work in black and white than colour.

Students' comments and the extremely positive parent questionnaire responses show that students enjoy school and they value education, seeing that it is for their own benefit. The very good curriculum allows them to enjoy a rich variety of courses. Performing arts and, increasingly, vocational courses allow students to follow appropriate and well-matched pathways as they progress through the school and towards future educational and work opportunities. Very few students do not go on to further education, employment or training. The professionally equipped salon is greatly appreciated by students who are following a hairdressing course, especially as the course is based at school and so they do not have to travel to the city centre.

A strong sense of self-control ensures that behaviour is very good around the school and in lessons. As one parent said, this shows excellent moral development.

Attendance is good and has risen, although there is still a very small proportion of students who are persistently absent. Students say they feel safe and are particularly emphatic about the way in which any bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively by staff, although this was a concern for a very small number of parents. Students have a very good understanding of the risks of substance abuse, and of how to make sure they protect themselves when using the internet. This includes ensuring that students do not receive threatening text messages or inappropriate comments on social networking sites. Very good pastoral support means students develop extremely well both socially and academically. The change of role for pastoral leaders to progress leaders has given a clear overview of how well students are progressing. Close liaison between leaders and form tutors means any underachievement is quickly identified and support put in place. Students know their challenging targets and how they are progressing in

relation to these. They speak very appreciatively of the excellent way in which they feel supported and how staff are prepared to give their all to ensure they achieve well. Very good support is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff ensure students are supported to make good progress with their written work as well as developing good learning habits, particularly for students who have trouble with their behaviour or are on the autistic spectrum.

The excellent teaching, curriculum and academic guidance now ensure that progress in lessons and across time is greatly improved. Students now achieve very well because they enjoy a rich variety of exciting and engaging lessons. The school has worked very successfully to extend the teaching strategies used by staff and to ensure planning is of a very high standard. Lessons often make excellent use of information and communication technology by both staff and students. Students have very good opportunities to work independently and can often be seen working very well in corridors or the hall, away from their class base. Because of their excellent relationships with staff, students feel trusted and hence repay that trust by working well and often making excellent progress in lessons. Assessment is used very well and is an integral part of all programmes of study. The strong emphasis on self- and peer assessment has resulted in a 'can do' culture. One area of concern identified by parents and some students is that homework is not consistently set by teachers, or monitored by form tutors. The use of advanced skills teachers and support from the school's specialist areas ensure that teaching is constantly developing and improving. Middle leaders also take responsibility to enhance the teaching quality in their subject areas. Senior management keep a strategic overview by developing the leadership capacity of middle managers, while holding them to account through a very coherent and rigorous process of departmental reviews.

The performing arts have made an excellent contribution to students' very good cultural and social development. Very comprehensive preparations have been made to combine both specialist areas by introducing the creative and media diploma from September 2009. The specialist areas also make a very good contribution to work with the local community. The school is recognised as an area of good practice when working as part of the 'Extra Mile' project. Unfortunately, work to develop a community sports facility alienated some local residents and the local council has now turned this down. The governing body offers very good support to the school and ensures it fulfils its statutory duties. However, it sometimes does not have enough in-depth understanding of data to provide sufficient challenge when required.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build upon the success at raising the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C by ensuring all students make very good progress.
- Ensure governors have a good understanding of relevant data so they are better able to challenge the school from an informed viewpoint.

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Annex A

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Bitterne Park School, Southampton, SO18 1BU

I visited your school recently with my colleague, met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were very impressed with your friendliness and helpfulness and how proud you are of your school. We can fully understand why you are so positive, and we agree that you attend an outstanding school. The performing arts are really important to you and they help you to mature socially, become more aware of the world around you and make sure you achieve well. They also ensure you make an excellent contribution to the local community.

Staff care for you excellently, and you are very well prepared for each stage of your education, including college or the world of work. We were particularly impressed by the very professional hairdressing salon where we observed some of you working, although I hope you are a little more gentle with real people, when you rinse their hair, than with the dummies!

Standards are high and many of you achieve exceptionally well in your GCSE examinations, particularly the very high proportion of you who gain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including mathematics and English, but some of you could do even better. We have asked your school to build upon this success to make sure you all make very good progress. You enjoy some excellent lessons and a curriculum that lets you follow a wide variety of courses. Many of you now take vocational courses and the school is using its vocational specialism well, including making very good plans to introduce the creative and media diploma next September. Behaviour was excellent and attendance is improving, although some of you still have too much time off school.

You know how to become healthy and many of you take part in a wide range of sports and performing arts. You also have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and of the dangers that you meet when out of school.

Your headteacher and her senior management team are very determined that you will all do as well as possible. This means some of you are rightly 'hassled' when you are not working to your full potential. Subject leaders and staff are all very focused on seeing how the school can improve from its very high standard and governors make sure all is going well. However, governors need to have a better understanding of the relevant information so that they are able to challenge the school from a more informed viewpoint.

I wish you well in this excellent school. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector