

Castlebrook High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105363
Local Authority	Bury
Inspection number	336484
Inspection dates	10–11 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Lowery 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	784
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Rob Dawson
Headteacher	Mr Anthony Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons of between 20 and 30 minutes each, observing 30 teaching staff, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students, and the school improvement partner. They observed the school's work and looked at documents including policies, development plans and safeguarding procedures. The responses to questionnaires from 92 parents and carers were considered together with replies from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether the improvements in achievement seen in 2009 are likely to be sustained
- how teaching and the curriculum support those students with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the contribution of the science and technology specialism to raising achievement
- how successful the school has been in engaging students in their learning, and in improving behaviour and attitudes.

Information about the school

Castlebrook High School is a specialist science and technology college which serves the area to the south of Bury. It has a purpose-built construction centre. Students are mainly White British; a few are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a small number speak English as an additional language. Just under one third of students are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is higher than that found nationally.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Following a period of rapid change Castlebrook is now providing its students with a good education. Students are well supported and benefit from a highly personalised curriculum. The leadership team places a clear emphasis on raising attainment and there is a good capacity for further school improvement.

Students join the school with below-average attainment, many with low standards of literacy. At the end of Key Stage 4 students' attainment is broadly in line with the national average. External examination data together with evidence seen in lessons show that a large majority of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress. Staff work hard to remove barriers to learning and there is an effective programme of intervention support for those who speak English as an additional language. However, some groups, including those in receipt of free school meals, make slightly less progress than other students.

Students say they feel safe in school and that adults are effective in providing further support if it is required. Almost all students have good attitudes to learning and behaviour is good. However, a small group with additional needs do not engage with their studies and have poor patterns of attendance. Students understand what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, but too few choose to participate in regular additional sporting activities.

The majority of teaching is good and learning normally takes place at a brisk pace. Progress is carefully tracked and, consequently, senior staff have a clear understanding of which students require additional support. However, in a minority of lessons there is insufficient planning and, as a result, the work is insufficiently matched to the needs of all students. Considerable effort has been put in to developing an imaginative curriculum. Students have early access to GCSEs and a flexible programme of more practical vocational courses. This has encouraged older students to achieve and offers good preparation for their future economic well-being. Students welcome the effective support they receive as they join the school, choose their course programmes and progress on to post-16 education or training.

The headteacher and his senior staff have a clear vision for the school's development and, as a result, rapid improvements have been made to all aspects of the school's work. Senior staff are rightly focused on seeking to achieve consistently good or better teaching across all subject areas. Members of the governing body, while supportive, recognise that systems are not in place to challenge routinely the middle leaders who manage the subject areas. The school operates as a cohesive community, but insufficient attention is given to ensuring students' appreciation of cultural diversity.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise levels of attainment by:
 - focusing on closing the gap in attainment between groups of students
 - monitoring the progress of all groups of students, including those entitled to free school meals
 - making sure that any deficiencies in core skills are addressed while students are in Key Stage 3.
- Further improve the overall quality of teaching to good by ensuring that:
 - information on students' prior attainment is used to plan lessons
 - work in lessons is designed to meet the needs of different groups of students
 - lesson activities are challenging with sufficient opportunities for independent learning
 - marking provides clear guidance to students about how to improve.
- Improve students' engagement in their learning by:
 - encouraging better attendance
 - focusing on communications with parents and carers in order to strengthen their support for their children's studies.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' achievement is good, in particular in vocational and specialist GCSE courses. The proportion attaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics is broadly average. The school achieved its best ever GCSE results in 2009, although these students had joined the school with low levels of attainment. This represents good progress. The school's specialisms of science and technology make a considerable contribution to raising attainment. This includes a high level of attainment on the BTEC science and construction courses.

Most aspects of students' personal development and well-being have steadily improved since the last inspection and are now good. An overwhelming majority of students reported they enjoyed coming to school. Mixed-age tutor groups are encouraging cooperation between older and young students. Behaviour in lessons, in particular where the teaching is well planned, and around school, is good. Exclusion rates are falling. Students are keen to take on leadership roles, including peer mentoring, and make a good contribution to the school and wider community. Key Stage 4 students are proud of their participation in community service projects as part of their citizenship course. Programmes to encourage social and emotional learning assist students' moral development. Levels of attendance are average. However, a few students continue to be persistently absent from school and this limits their progress.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is rapidly improving. All teachers have good subject knowledge and place a suitable emphasis on supporting students in their preparation for their external examinations. However, in a minority of classes work is insufficiently planned and tailored to meet the needs of all students. Here lessons occasionally lack pace, a few students become bored and their learning slows. Staff work hard to ensure that the classrooms and corridors provide a stimulating range of displays. In the most effective lessons these are used to reinforce students' learning. The quality of feedback that students get from teachers on the quality of their work varies because marking is not yet consistently good across all subjects.

The curriculum is a particular strength. Students are responding well to the challenge of a shortened Key Stage 3 and welcome the opportunity to start GCSE and vocational courses in Year 9. Early entry to examinations is raising aspirations and increasing students' self-confidence in what they can achieve. This is having a considerable impact on engaging most students in their studies and assisting them to make good progress. The specialism is strengthening the curriculum. During the inspection students were clearly excited by the opportunities to participate in the science week, which included a wind turbine challenge for Year 9. A broad range of extra-curricular activities are on offer. However, only a minority of students regularly participate in these after-school activities.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Effective systems are in place to support students as they join the school. Excellent links with primary schools enable additional support to be given to vulnerable pupils before they start at Castlebrook. Careful guidance is provided from Year 8 to ensure that students make appropriate choices and benefit from their flexible curriculum. Students are well prepared for progression from school at age 16 and, as a result, the numbers not moving on to education, employment or training are low.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management have been strengthened at all levels. The headteacher provides a clear vision for the continued development of the school. He has worked with the governors to set ambitious targets for raising attainment, and achievement has improved. There is a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Development plans clearly set down what needs to be done to secure further improvements. Staff have been supported in improving teaching and learning and this continues to be a whole-school priority. There is good local community and business representation on the governing body which has supported the development of the vocational curriculum. However, systems to link governors and curriculum leaders are underdeveloped as are some of the procedures for routinely monitoring equalities. Partnerships are a real strength of the school. Effective links with the youth service allow for a coordinated approach for the support of teenagers. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure safeguarding supported by meticulous record keeping. All staff receive regular training and are aware of their responsibility to keep young people safe. There is a high profile programme of education on e-safety and, as a result, students demonstrate a good awareness of the dangers of using new technology, the internet and digital communications. There is a clear understanding by senior staff of their responsibilities to promote community cohesion which has contributed to the strong shared ethos across the school. However, the work to promote an understanding of cultural diversity and global issues is at an early stage and has yet to demonstrate a real impact on students' attitudes and understanding. The leadership team has been proactive in seeking additional resources and, as a result, the school has been able to invest in upgrading its facilities, including the Astro turf sports area. Financial management is secure and the school provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Although the number of questionnaires returned by parents and carers during the inspection was relatively small, a very large majority of those responding are happy with their children's education. A few parents and carers expressed concerns about communications between the school and home and commented that the school did not always deal effectively with poor behaviour. Inspectors found that systems for regular communication were in place and that extensive advice was available for those choosing GCSE options. However, the school was less effective in working alongside parents and carers in engaging them with their children's attendance and education. Inspectors found that the school had sound systems for managing behaviour. Where occasional instances of poor behaviour arose these were limited to a small group of more challenging students; the school is increasingly effective in managing this behaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Castlebrook High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 784 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	27	53	58	10	11	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	23	25	64	70	4	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	22	24	62	67	7	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	29	57	62	8	9	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	21	23	62	67	8	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	24	26	56	61	11	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	13	14	66	72	8	9	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	22	24	58	63	3	3	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	22	64	70	4	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	25	53	58	9	10	6	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	15	56	61	15	16	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	26	28	54	59	9	10	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	37	47	51	7	8	3	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 March 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Castlebrook High School, Bury, BL9 8LP

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and taking the time to show us your work and talk to us during our recent inspection. We judged your school to be providing you with a good and steadily improving education.

You told us through your questionnaires and in discussions how you feel safe in school and welcomed the support and care received from staff. Relationships with staff are normally good. In particular we noted how pleased you were with the flexibility offered by the choice in your curriculum from Year 9 and that you were proud to achieve success through early entry to your examinations. You are making good progress in school. We found that your school is well led and that there is a real drive to help you all to attain well.

Your headteacher agrees with us that there are a number of areas that need to continue to improve, including:

- ensuring that all students achieve their potential
- strengthening the quality of teaching
- supporting you to engage in your studies.

You have an important role in helping to develop your school, in particular through ensuring regular attendance at school and taking part in the broad range of additional clubs and sporting activities on offer.

Best wishes to you for your future and good luck with your studies.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lowery

Her Majesty's Inspector

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