



Castle High School & Visual Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103867
LEA Dudley
Inspection number 277017
Inspection dates 23 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Sue Harrison HMIHMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	St James's Road
School category	Voluntary aided		Dudley
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		West Midlands DY1 3JE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01384 816045
Number on roll	1057	Fax number	01384 816046
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Peter Marsh
Date of previous inspection	27 September 1999	Headteacher	Mr Trevor Johnson

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	23 November 2005 - 24 November 2005	277017

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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

Castle High is a comprehensive school that became a specialist school in the Visual Arts in July 2004. The majority of learners are from disadvantaged backgrounds and the number of pupils eligible for free school meals is twice the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is well above the national average. 37.6% of students are from minority ethnic groups and 16 languages are spoken by pupils. The school is committed to inclusion. It has won a number of awards and is oversubscribed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

The effectiveness of the school is good and inspectors agreed with the school judgement that it gives good value for money. There is strong leadership provided by the headteacher and good teamwork across the school. There is a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising the achievement of learners. The significant improvements in examination results in the last two years demonstrate the impact of these features.

The majority of pupils enjoy school and feel they are in a safe, stimulating environment where they are encouraged to learn and their achievements are well celebrated. Particular strengths in the curriculum include the focus on the needs of individual learners and increasing vocational choice for older pupils. The school has made some improvement in addressing weaknesses in information and communication technology (ICT) but it has not yet made sufficient progress in this area in Years 7 to 9. The standards achieved in art and design are outstanding and the impact of the specialist status of the school is beginning to have a positive impact across the whole school. The quality of support given to pupils is good. The school has developed a strong culture of inclusion for all its pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress at the school.

The school has an effective system for monitoring and evaluating its work with a particular focus on teaching and learning. Teaching is good but there is scope for pupils to take more responsibility for their learning in some lessons. The school knows its strengths and what it needs to do to improve further, for example to address the less satisfactory attendance and behaviour of a minority of pupils. The inspection confirms that improvements have been made in teaching and learning and standards have risen. The school is well placed to improve further.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils in years 7 to 9 receive their full entitlement to information technology.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop responsibility for their own learning and behaviour.
- Continue to improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

The achievements of pupils are good when compared with their prior attainment. Pupils enter the school with below average results in their assessments at the end of Year 6. The majority of pupils make good progress in several subject areas although standards remain below average. Examination results have improved and are now

good when compared with similar schools. The results of the National Curriculum tests for Year 9 pupils show significant improvement. Results were good in 2004 in mathematics and science. The 2005 results show mathematics rising by a further 2% and English rising by 8%. Pupils are achieving a greater proportion of higher grades.

The school has successfully implemented a number of strategies to raise standards and improve achievement in recent years. The impact of these is seen in the much improved GCSE results in 2005. The targets set for the year group were exceeded, with the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more A*-C grades rising to 46%, an 11% increase on the previous year. While this is still below the national average, it represents good progress and achievement for these pupils when compared with their scores on entry to the school. GCSE pass rates improved significantly in English in 2005. Other subjects that performed well include business studies, history, music and religious studies. Standards are lower in ICT and geography. Consistent with the school's specialism, pupils make excellent progress in art and design. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language make good progress.

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being

Pupils generally have good attitudes to learning and say they enjoy their education. Most pupils feel safe in school, but some younger ones find it hard to adjust to life in a larger school. Attendance has improved since the last inspection but is still below average. Moral, social and cultural education is good and spiritual development satisfactory. These are promoted effectively through the school's good personal, social health and citizenship programmes, and also through students' involvement in activities such as the newly formed School Council. Charitable fund-raising helps pupils to develop awareness of local and national issues. Behaviour is satisfactory. It is good in lessons where most students are punctual, settle well, listen attentively and concentrate on their work. It is also usually good around the school at breaks and lesson change times, but there are instances of poor behaviour, which are generally dealt with effectively. Students appreciate the school's merit system, which motivates them to gain rewards for good behaviour and achievements. They take part in healthy living through sporting activities, healthy food at lunch and break times and are learning about the dangers to health of smoking and taking drugs. There is a well developed programme to help pupils prepare for being responsible citizens in society. Pupils are acquiring workplace skills and adequate literacy and numeracy. The school could do more to ensure they acquire more wide ranging ICT skills.

Grade: 3

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is good. In the majority of lessons teachers demonstrate good specialist knowledge and structure the learning to match the needs of pupils. As a result pupils make good progress with their learning. The purpose of activities is clearly communicated to pupils and they receive regular marking including comments on their progress and how to improve. In many lessons the quality of questioning and explanation challenges pupils to think and leads to good attitudes to learning. In a minority of lessons activities are not sufficiently matched to pupils' needs and the pace and challenge of the learning suffers as a result. Generally behaviour in lessons is good and the working relationship between teachers and their pupils supports learning well. The assessment of learning needs, including language and learning difficulties and disabilities, is thorough and used increasingly to ensure all pupils achieve. Pupils are beginning to be more involved in evaluating and assessing their own work. The school is trying to develop an approach where pupils take more responsibility for their learning and behaviour and inspectors agree that this should be developed further.

The school has a secure approach to the monitoring of teaching. Senior and middle managers know the strengths and weaknesses and have strategies in place to make improvements. Imaginative use of an internally appointed team of advanced skills teachers is supporting developments and improvement through collaborative training.

Grade: 2

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is broad and balanced at both key stages. It caters for individual needs and offers students, including the most vulnerable, a good range of academic and personal development opportunities. It is significantly enhanced as a result of the school's specialist visual arts college status. Provision for gifted and talented students is good. In Key Stage 4 the options available to students have been widened to include a range of applied GCSE subjects: art AS and A Level, media studies and BTEC construction. The school offers an alternative curriculum for vulnerable students. However, the provision for ICT in Key Stage 3 and religious education in Key Stage 4 does not fully meet statutory requirements. The school is working closely with the local education authority (LEA) to improve literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. There are good opportunities for enrichment activities during and after school. These contribute much to pupils' academic achievement and enhance their personal and social skills.

Grade: 3**Care, guidance and support**

Students receive good care, guidance and support. Staff are highly committed and endeavour to ensure that all students feel safe and to establish positive relationships with the local community. Child protection, health, safety and risk assessments are all fully in place. The school supports its most vulnerable pupils very well through the work of the learning support staff and through the establishment of centres for KS3 and KS4 pupils who are in danger of being excluded. The school's attention to the inclusion of all its pupils in all aspects of school life is outstanding.

Measures introduced to monitor attendance have led to improvement but the school needs to ensure all pupils attend more regularly. Academic monitoring and target setting is in place to enable pupils to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Parents receive information on their child's progress and the school is looking at ways to develop this further. Pupils receive good advice and guidance at critical stages in their education, for example, when choosing their GCSE subject options and later on, when preparing to move from school into further education or the world of work.

Grade: 2**Leadership and management**

The school evaluates leadership and management as good and inspectors agree with this judgement. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and has established a culture of change, which emphasises inclusion and the continuing improvement of students' achievements. He is well supported by his senior colleagues and the local education authority. The school's self-evaluation is sound and improving at all levels, enabling it to focus clearly on the key areas for improvement. The views of students, parents, partner schools, further education providers and employers are sought. Staff feel valued and support the changes being made. The appointment of a school team of advanced skills teachers to work with staff on further improvement is a significant innovation. Non-teaching posts have been effectively expanded and restructured to release teachers from administrative tasks.

The governing body provides a sound level of support and critical challenge for the school and ensures almost all statutory responsibilities are fulfilled. A recent LEA audit of the school's financial procedures highlighted the need to strengthen some areas of financial management. The school is operating a budget deficit which has been agreed by the local education authority. Resources are well deployed to support the school's efforts to raise standards. The school has made satisfactory progress in addressing the key points for improvement identified in the last

inspection but further modifications to the curriculum are needed to enable students to develop their information technology skills. Progress has been made in improving attendance but it remains below the national average. Given its challenging socio-economic circumstances and the good progress students make, the school provides good value for money. It is well placed to improve further.

Grade: 2

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Castle High School St James's Road Dudley West Midlands DY1 3JE

25 November 2005

Dear Pupils

As you know a group of inspectors recently visited your school. Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us and your help in finding our way around and giving us your views about the school. We really enjoyed our visit. I am writing now to tell you about our findings.

We found there were many things that the school does well. The headteacher leads the school very effectively and the staff work well together as a team. The majority of you are happy to come to school, work hard and take advantage of the wide range of activities and events the school provides for you. Teachers and other staff know you well and work hard to help each individual to succeed. The performance in examinations is improving. The art and design work across the whole school is excellent. Last year almost all pupils left school with some GCSE passes and almost half passed at least five of their GCSE's at the higher grades A*-C. This is a very good achievement for the school and we think you would do even better if some pupils were more active in lessons and took more responsibility for their own learning and behaviour. Most of you behave well at school but there is a small minority who do not. We also think some pupils need to attend more regularly to gain the most from their school experience. The school is working hard to give pupils in the upper school more options to choose from. We think lower school pupils need more time to develop their ICT skills.

We are confident the school will continue to improve and we wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Sue Harrison Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools