

Cowes High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118201
Local Authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	339165
Inspection dates	27–28 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Pye

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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	860
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rhona Trodd
Headteacher	David Snashall
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 December 2006
School address	Crossfield Avenue Cowes Isle of Wight PO31 8HR
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Age group	13–19
Inspection date(s)	27–28 January 2010
Inspection number	339165

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

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Almost two thirds of the inspection time was spent in lessons and in scrutinising students' work. Twenty-five lessons were observed and a further 20 part-lessons were visited. Meetings were held with students, teaching and other staff, school leaders and managers, representatives from the local authority and governors. A further meeting was held with representatives of two partner schools. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at data relating to students' progress, monitoring records kept by the school and planning documentation. A total of 73 parent questionnaires were scrutinised, as were student questionnaires.

The school has curriculum partnership arrangements with several other local schools and other providers. Separate inspection teams inspected this school and two others simultaneously to give all three the opportunity to explain the contribution made by this co-ordinated work to the outcomes for their students, within the context of this broader provision.

The headteacher focuses on long-term, strategic management whilst liaising with the associate headteacher on more on-going matters.

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

- the progress and attainment of current students
- the impact of the highly innovative curriculum arrangements
- the impact of leadership and management at all levels on attainment and progress in mathematics, in the performance of girls and in lowering the drop-out rates in the sixth form
- the effect on students' outcomes of the specialist subject
- the apparent strengths in promoting students' personal development and the care of, guidance and support for students
- how well the school's partnerships with other institutions improve outcomes for students.

Information about the school

This slightly smaller than average secondary school draws students from a predominantly White British background. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, although the number with a statement of special educational need is in line with national expectations. A below-average proportion of students is entitled to free school meals.

The school has recently been designated as a business and enterprise specialist college. The school is subject to ongoing reorganisation arrangements.

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Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It has particular strengths in the quality of its safeguarding arrangements, the care, guidance and support for students, the curriculum and in the quality of partnerships. One parent echoed the views of others when writing, 'I feel that the leadership team and all the staff have the students' welfare and education as a top priority'.

Students benefit from good teaching and attain standards that are average. Students leaving Year 11 in 2009 entered the school with standards that were generally below, and sometimes well below, those expected. They made good progress overall; although less so in mathematics largely as a consequence of leadership and teacher recruitment problems. The progress of current students in mathematics is satisfactory.

Relationships in lessons are positive; teaching is good. Many teachers use assessment data well to plan work for students of different abilities and use marking to give students clear guidance on what to do to improve their work. However, this practice is inconsistent across the school. Students' personal development is good. They have a good knowledge of how to stay safe and demonstrate this well when suggesting changes to security around the school. The school has worked hard to reduce absenteeism, including introducing student 'attendance plans', but it remains broadly average.

Students have very positive views about the excellent, innovative curriculum. They feel that the increased lesson time gives them more chance to develop and finish their work. This is helping them to make better progress. GCSE, level two courses can be taken in mixed-age, one-year classes. Students also have the chance to study a variety of subjects such as etiquette for gentlemen and Japanese for beginners. Outstanding partnerships with other schools, learning providers and the local college enable students to access a wide range of vocational and other courses. These opportunities provide many students with high-quality experience of the working world, which along with their achievement in basic skills, help prepare them well for later life.

Monitoring and evaluation are well established in the school. Governance is

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outstanding and governors use focused scrutiny groups to oversee and report on aspects of the school's work. Such strategies help ensure that they have a very secure knowledge of the school. Accurate self-evaluation takes place and the successful actions taken by leaders and managers to introduce an effective and flexible curriculum have improved student's achievement and the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good since the last inspection. This reflects good capacity to improve still further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the improvements in the progress of students in mathematics through:
 - providing teachers of the subject with opportunities to observe and share good practice in the classroom
 - strengthening the specialist leadership of the subject.
- Eradicate the inconsistencies in teaching in the main school and sixth form through ensuring that;
 - all teachers plan work effectively for students of different abilities
 - all teachers give clear guidance to students on the next steps in their learning through their written marking.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students show enjoyment and interest in learning, and achieve well. For example, Year 11 looked at a stimulating video and discussed animatedly the issue of conscientious objectors in a religious studies lesson. Year 10 GCSE, level two history students reacted positively to the challenge of drawing up a Nazi school timetable. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress as a consequence of some well-focused support, and good tracking of the impact of any interventions. The gap between the achievement of lower ability girls and their peers has been monitored carefully and has been closed as a result of well targeted support. There is now no significant difference between the progress of different student groups.

Recent school data show a number of improvements in the attainment and achievement of students. For example, the percentage of students attaining five or more A* to C grades rose to 67% in 2009, thereby exceeding the target set. Current tracking data show most students achieving well in the majority of subjects, although mathematics remains as a relative weakness as a core subject. Good learning in vocational subjects and on the specialist business courses has also led to improvements in attainment.

Students have a good knowledge of how to stay healthy and participate well in the various physical exercise opportunities they have during and after school. This is reflected in the school's Healthy Schools Award. Students behave well although when

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the lessons involve too much teacher input they can become restless. Older students make a good contribution to the community through working as mentors with younger children. School councillors take an active part in decision-making.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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	2
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	3

How effective is the provision?

Students benefit in lessons from teachers' secure subject knowledge. This is used well to plan a good variety of activities that motivate and hold students' attention except in the few lessons where teachers talk for too long. Resources are used well to challenge students. In an art lesson, a wide range of materials allowed older students to work in many media forms, including computer graphics. A few teachers do not use information about prior achievement to identify sufficiently challenging tasks for students of different abilities. Consequently progress slows in these lessons. Most students have a clear idea of their targets although not all are given a clear enough idea through teachers' marking of how to improve their work.

The ethos of 'stage not age' helps ensure that students access GCSE courses in Year 10 and functional mathematics and English in Year 9. Students report that where more practical problem-solving activities are set then their learning benefits well. The school has taken an active role in the local consortium and such excellent partnerships allow the delivery of vocational and diploma courses, like hair and beauty. It is too early to see the full impact of the specialist subject on students' attainment and progress.

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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There is an excellent commitment to the care, guidance and support for students and the effective 'family mentor' system has improved communication between parents, students and staff. Excellent transition arrangements, both into and out of the school, help students to settle quickly and make appropriate choices, for example, regarding their Year 9 courses. Vulnerable students are given a very high level of support, and the provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is of high quality. Very good use is made of a wide range of external agencies to support students and this includes effective careers advice which encourages students to aim high.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher deals with long term planning and working closely with his associate headteacher and governors, has established a very clear direction for the school based around improvement, partnerships and inclusion. Senior managers conduct effective reviews of subject areas and consequently build a detailed and accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Subject leaders participate fully in self-evaluation, although subject development plans do not include yet more focused objectives and measurable success criteria. The curriculum provides students with a chance to make realistic choices, thereby contributing exceptionally well to equal opportunity and full inclusion.

Illustrative of its effective partnerships, the school has sought external specialist advice and guidance relating to mathematics, and consequently, achievement is improving. However, there are missed opportunities for teachers to share good practice, particularly in mathematics and thereby further accelerate students' progress. Safeguarding procedures are extremely thorough. The school uses external agencies well to support students, and detailed policies exist which are monitored very well by the governing body. The school has yet to complete its audit of the impact of its work in the area of community cohesion, although this is particularly strong in the local area.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and	2
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driving improvement 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	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The decline in numbers entering the sixth form has been reversed, a result of the positive experience of pupils from Year 11 accessing early entry into sixth form/level three courses. Better preparation for sixth form life through detailed induction, delivered at an earlier stage in Year 11 has contributed to minimising the drop-out rate. Standards are average. Students enter the sixth form with wide differences in their prior qualifications. They achieve satisfactorily although there are variations between subjects and the quality of teaching. Students, for example, have and know their personal targets but teachers do not consistently make it clear as to what students need to do to improve their work. Students confirm this view when they say that they value the support they get from teachers but that it varies according to the subject.

Stronger subjects include English, geography, physical education and the BTEC courses do well. There is a wide range of AS, A-level and vocational courses on offer as a result of the highly effective collaborative arrangements with other local schools and the college. Leadership and management are good. There is a strong focus on improving outcomes and addressing areas of concern. For example, the rigorous system for tracking and analysing progress is leading to faster intervention to help support students in need of further support.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	3
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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Views of parents and carers

Among those parents who completed questionnaires, the majority is satisfied with the education their child receives. Some expressed concerns about the quality of teaching, but the inspection found that teaching has improved as a result of close monitoring staff training and that it is generally good. However, a few inconsistencies in practice remain. Some parents had concerns over behaviour. After looking at behaviour logs and through observation and discussions with students, the inspectors judged that students behave well for the most part. The issue of taking note of parents' suggestions was investigated and the existence of a parents' forum was noted as an example of where the school seeks and acts upon parents' suggestions. For example, the school has acted over parents' and students' suggestions regarding timetables, homework policy and the use of planners to improve communication.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Cowes 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 73 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 860 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	13	18	50	68	8	11	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	14	60	82	2	3	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	19	26	39	53	13	18	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	19	42	58	11	15	4	5
The teaching is good at this school	9	12	40	55	20	27	2	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	14	19	38	52	18	25	3	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	15	50	68	11	15	0	0
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)	15	21	41	56	10	14	3	7
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	19	37	51	17	23	3	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	8	11	38	52	14	19	7	10
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	10	43	59	13	18	2	12
The school is led and managed effectively	15	21	40	55	15	21	1	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	27	38	52	9	12	4	4

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 all 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 pupils' 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.



29 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Cowes High School, Cowes PO31 8HB

Thank you for your kind welcome and the help you gave us when we visited your school. We listened to your views carefully and agree that yours is a good school.

Thanks particularly to those students, including council members, who took time out to speak to us.

Your completed questionnaires and what you told us were helpful. Like you, we believe that you benefit very well from the school's interesting and original curriculum. It allows you to take more advanced courses earlier and ensures that there is a wide choice of activities for you to do. The care, guidance and support you all receive, particularly for those of you who are in need of additional help, are excellent. You told us how effective the mentoring system is. We saw for ourselves the positive effect the outstanding partnerships with other schools and institutions have on your attainment and progress.

While there are inconsistencies in some aspects of teaching you receive, we believe it is good overall, and is reflected in your progress. We have asked the school to help teachers to improve their planning to challenge students of different abilities. We also think that there could be clearer guidance given in marking to show you how you can improve your work.

The school is committed to improving and to giving you challenging and varied opportunities to achieve. Leadership and management in the school are good and they have done much to support your learning in mathematics and your progress has improved as a result. We have asked the school to build further on the improvements they have made in mathematics, particularly in aspects of leadership and teaching. The school benefits very well from the work of experienced and skilful governors.

Thank you once again and, on behalf of the team, I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Pye
Lead inspector

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