

The Cherwell School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123251
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314553
Inspection date	29 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Limm 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1777
6th form	434
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Kate Williams
Headteacher	Mrs Jill Judson
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
School address	Marston Ferry Road Oxford OX2 7EE
Telephone number	01865 558719
Fax number	01865 311165

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector, who evaluated the school's overall effectiveness and investigated the following issues:

- Some specific aspects of achievement and standards, such as how well students at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are performing currently and how well different groups make progress.
- The impact of school initiatives, such as using data rigouresly to plan engaging lessons, the earlier intervention for students who are underachieving, and the closer tracking of student progress on the quality of teaching and learning
- The incidence and significance of poor attendance.

Evidence was gathered from details of current standards and achievement; examination of school documents and procedures; observation of lessons; analysis of parents' responses to questionnaires; and discussions with staff, including the Headteacher and senior leadership team, heads of faculty and pastoral care, the chair of governors and groups of students. Other aspects of the schools work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors used the school's self-evaluation to support judgements of some other areas when this proved possible.

Description of the school

The Cherwell School is a large oversubscribed mixed comprehensive school serving a wide-ranging community in North Oxford. It has a large sixth form which admits a substantial number of external students in Year 12. It became an 11-18 school in 2003 following local reorganisation and has a split site. In the same year the school became a specialist science college. Although students are from above average socio-economic backgrounds, including those occupations associated with the universities in the city, a significant number are from less advantaged backgrounds and eligibility for free school meals is in line with the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is higher than the national average and the percentage of students who have English as an additional language is also higher. The number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is about average but the percentage of students with statements of special educational need is higher. There are units on site for students with hearing impairment and students with autism.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Cherwell School is providing an outstanding quality of education. One parent said that attending the school had 'opened up a whole new world to our daughter'. This positive note was echoed by a parent of two students who welcomed 'the great opportunities for extra curricular activities' provided by the school and the fact that both her children 'have been enabled to reach their academic potential by some excellent teaching'. The school prides itself on creating a well-ordered learning environment in which students reach very high levels of personal development and academic attainment. The students confirmed this wholeheartedly when they spoke of their teachers who 'made lessons fun' and they valued greatly the additional support they received when needed.

The prior attainment of students on entry is slightly above average but this masks the very wide range of ability students have on admission. This makes students' outstanding achievement through the school even more impressive. Students achievement is outstanding because they are taught extremely well, have access to an excellent curriculum and are very well cared for. The headteacher has led and managed the school extremely well since the reorganisation. She has been very ably supported by her highly effective senior team and the excellent work undertaken by other staff. This has led to excellent progress since the last inspection and provides clear evidence of the school's outstanding capacity to improve further. This is especially the case in relation to the school's rigorous use of assessment information to track student progress and plan excellent support for individuals who are underachieving. Parents and carers are very supportive of the school and balance this with sensible suggestions for change when they perceive aspects require further improvement. The school works hard to address parental concerns quickly and justly and the quality of its communication with parents and others is excellent.

Students' attainment on entry is just above average. They make outstanding overall progress. Standards are consistently high in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form, although in 2007 there was a slight dip in performance at GCSE and some students underachieved. The school's more rigorous use of assessment information has led to much improved tracking of student progress and provision of more appropriate learning support for those who require it. This has meant that students in Key Stage 4 are now well placed to meet challenging examination targets in 2008. Now all groups of students make excellent progress. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress that is just as good as their peers. Standards in science are consistently well above average and represent very strong achievement, enabling the faculty to meet, and regularly exceed, targets associated with its specialist status.

Another key factor in students' excellent academic achievement is the great strength in their personal development and well-being. Their mature and responsible attitudes also prepare them very well for the next stage in their lives. The overwhelming majority of students behave exceptionally well, are courteous and are proud of their school. They contribute strongly to its positive atmosphere, evident in the excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers. Students say they enjoy school and most attend well. A small number of students are persistent absentees. The school has tried to improve their attendance but the impact of these initiatives is not yet bringing about clear enough improvement.

Students feel very secure. They say they trust the staff and know who to go to with concerns. There are very few behavioural issues but students are confident that they are dealt with

effectively. Students show excellent awareness of the need to behave safely and are well informed about issues such as drugs and sexual health. Students have a good understanding of how to lead healthy lives through taking exercise and eating well. The students make a very positive contribution in school. For example, older students support younger ones as learning mentors. The students show strong support for the well-being of others and the community outside. Students engage very well with difficult cultural and moral issues and this continues effectively in the sixth form.

The school knows and values all its students as individuals. The identification and monitoring of students with additional learning needs, including learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are excellent. Highly effective support is provided through individual mentoring when needed. Very effective help is given in the school's behaviour base for those who find it difficult to manage their own behaviour. The school has strong links with outside agencies to support vulnerable students.

The quality of teaching is excellent. Teachers have very high expectations and clear objectives for learning. They manage behaviour well, ensuring lessons have an interesting range of tasks, including opportunities to share and extend students' understanding. Students are well aware of what to do to improve through regular marking and feedback from teachers and self-assessment. Assessment data is used very well in most lessons to match learning to students' needs. This reflects the school's effective focus on embedding important techniques from the national initiatives to improve teaching and learning even further.

The curriculum meets students' needs very well. An excellent set of curriculum pathways allows students to study for an individualised mix of qualifications. The alternative curriculum programmes for those students who express an interest in more vocational and work related courses have expanded well since the last inspection. The school works well with other local providers to ensure that students are able to follow appropriate courses elsewhere if needed but less able students who wish to remain at school post-16 require better in-house provision. The school's specialist subject is making an excellent impact on the curriculum at all Key Stages involving new courses, the development of extremely good on-line resources and extension materials for all abilities, including the gifted and talented. The contribution of specialist status to the community is excellent, for example, through partnership work with schools locally and within wider collaborations.

The headteacher, through highly effective teamwork with senior colleagues, builds on previous successes for improving the academic and personal development of all students. Monitoring and evaluation at senior level are systematic, involve the collection of a wide range of evidence and yield an accurate understanding of most areas requiring improvement. Faculty and departmental self-evaluations use challenging targets to generate improvement. Middle leadership is excellent, with much strong practice in both subject and year leadership. The governing body monitors the school well. Governors are committed to the school's continued success and check its progress through effective monitoring and challenge.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The quality of provision in the sixth form is outstanding and has improved since the last inspection. Standards are significantly above national averages and achievement is outstanding. Teaching and learning are consistently excellent. Teachers have very high levels of subject knowledge and expertise with the best lessons characterised by clear objectives, a brisk pace

and very challenging activities. Opportunities for independent learning are well-developed and the quality of care is exemplary. As one student commented, 'the teachers make lessons interesting and really care for us'. Personal development is outstanding and students demonstrate exemplary attitudes, behaviour and maturity in lessons. They communicate very effectively and there are excellent relationships between staff and students. Highly effective monitoring ensures students are clear about their targets and how to improve, whilst regular reporting allows for good communication between the school and home.

The curriculum in the sixth form meets the needs of the students very well. However, the school is not complacent and rightly seeks continually to broaden and diversify its vocational and work-related choices available for Year 11 students who wish to remain at the school post-16. The majority of students value complimentary studies and find many of the options stimulating and useful. Opportunities are provided for involvement in the community and some students work in the lower school, for example, as peer listening and language support mentors. Leadership and management are very strong with a clear understanding of how to raise standards. Self-evaluation is outstanding and informs the school about how to improve systems and procedures, for example the use of focus groups to improve the effectiveness of the students' voice.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the attendance of persistent absentees.
- Seek to broaden the vocational and work-related programmes in the sixth form even further.

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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	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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
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

08 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Cherwell School, Oxford, OX2 7EE

Thank you for your positive contributions during our visit to your school recently. We learnt a great deal from talking with you and the staff. These are our main findings.

For students in the main school:

- The school provides you with outstanding education and care.
- Your academic standards and progress are excellent.
- Most of you really enjoy coming to school, attend well and get on very well with each other.
- You told us you feel well cared for and the staff are committed to helping you make as much progress as possible.
- Lessons are excellent and often 'fun'.
- The school provides an outstanding curriculum which supports your academic progress as well as the development of your excellent attitudes and behaviour.
- The staff, led by the headteacher, work extremely well together to check how effective the school is and to make improvements where necessary.

For sixth-form students:

- The sixth form is excellent overall and very popular.
- You attain very high standards, and you make excellent progress.
- As mature young people you are excellent role models for the younger students.
- The staff take very good care of you and relationships between you and the staff are positive and enable them to give you very good support.
- The school does an excellent job in offering the subjects you want to study.
- The sixth form is very well led and is an important feature of the school.

In any school, even one judged outstanding, there are ways to improve and I have asked the headteacher to focus on the following areas:

- Improve the attendance of persistent absentees.
- Seek to broaden the vocational and work-related programmes in the sixth form even further.

Thanks again for your help and good luck for the future.

Peter Limm

Her Majesty's Inspector