

The Cavendish School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114605
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	326049
Inspection dates	10–11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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)	992
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	N Askew
Headteacher	KJ Fitzpatrick
Date of previous school inspection	November 2005
School address	Eldon Road Eastbourne East Sussex BN21 1UE
Telephone number	01323 731340
Fax number	01323 739572

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school has held specialist arts status since 2002. Boys outnumber girls, particularly in Years 7 and 11. Less than 20% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds; for about half of them English is not their first language. A lower than average proportion of students has learning difficulties and/or disabilities which are mainly linked to behavioural, emotional and social needs. The school has gained several national accreditations including Healthy Schools and Artsmark Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. In September 2008, the new headteacher determined to reverse the slight decline in standards and achievement, particularly in mathematics, since 2006. He has succeeded by generating a culture of high expectations amongst staff and students. They, and parents, are clear that the school is moving forward fast, that morale is high and that they feel confident that the school is set to improve further in the future. The very positive changes that have happened during the last 10 months, confirm that the school's capacity to improve is outstanding.

The headteacher has appointed an enthusiastic and confident senior leadership team. He has welcomed local authority advice and support and introduced strong measures to ensure students achieve well in 2009 and beyond. Teachers feel valued and fully support the initiatives the headteacher has introduced. Behaviour, which is good, has improved and the number of fixed-term exclusions has fallen. Attendance is now average. Students are cared for well. The school's evaluation of its strengths and areas for development is excellent, as is senior and middle leaders' united work to follow the clear direction established for improvement.

Achievement is good, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Standards are now above average, having risen fast this year. In several subjects, they are well above average. In GCSE and applied art and design, one of the school's specialist subjects, over 70% of students attained A*/A grades in 2008. Students are regularly involved in high quality performances of drama, music and dance and their contribution to the local community, particularly its enjoyment of the arts, is excellent.

Many students take on positions of responsibility and develop good leadership and social skills. The active school council is one of several ways in which the school listens and responds to students' opinions. Students enjoy school life and have very good relationships with teachers. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They discuss their understanding of diversity and community issues confidently.

Teaching is good, with many lessons including a range of interesting activities so that students are engaged and learn well. By showing students how to carry out research and how best to complete coursework, teachers encourage them to work independently. The school has succinct data showing how well students are doing and many teachers use these to plan work at different levels. However, in some lessons this does not happen so that some students find the work too easy or too difficult, including subjects where students are set by ability.

Some parents have concerns about the regularity and quality of homework which was not set consistently at the time of the previous inspection. The school has tried alternatives styles and ways of setting homework but these have not been successful and senior leaders know that further work is needed on this. Another issue in the previous inspection report, the lack of citizenship in all years, has been tackled very well and this subject, combined with life skills, is now a strength of the good curriculum. These subjects prepare students well for their future education and lives beyond school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers plan work to match students' range of abilities so that higher attainers are challenged and lower attainers can tackle work confidently.
- Decide what style of homework is best for students and set it regularly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are now above average and in all years students achieve well. Students enter the school with average levels of attainment. Historically, they have made better progress in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. The 2008 points score for students' best eight GCSEs was significantly above average. Girls achieved well but the percentage of boys attaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was below average because they underachieved.

This year, regular and accurate monitoring of performance meant that underachieving students in Year 11 were highlighted early enough for intense intervention to have a positive impact. Individual support, after school, Saturday morning and half-term and holiday revision sessions have contributed to good progress in Years 10 and 11. From the beginning of the year, students knew what GCSE grades they should achieve. One-third of Year 11 students were entered for mathematics GCSE early and all attained grade C or above. Moderated coursework marks in several subjects add extra weight to the school's confidence that boys will achieve well in 2009.

In most of the school's specialist subjects, standards are consistently high, especially in art and design and dance. In several other subjects, such as English literature, history, humanities, religious education and physical education, GCSE results were well above average in 2008. The few students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve at least as well as others, as do those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The headteacher encourages students to express their views about school life through the school council. A few students have been trained to observe lessons and to comment on teaching styles. Almost one in four students is involved in the council or working parties, for example, choosing a local charity and organising fund raising. As a student observed, 'Anyone can get involved. It's very diverse here but everyone counts'.

The large majority of students are confident, respectful, and keen to do well. Those who find it hard to concentrate in lessons now receive support which is helping them to behave more thoughtfully. Students understand the importance of leading healthy lifestyles. Many participate in sports outside school hours. Students respond well to the life skills programme which ensures that they know the dangers of drugs and alcohol and understand sex and relationships issues and the importance of safe lifestyles, for example in using the Internet.

Students take part in a wide range of activities in the local community. Their artwork, for example, is displayed in a seafront hotel and loaned to local businesses. The school has established valuable links with schools overseas, for example in France and Malawi, and recently achieved the Intermediate International School Award.

Students benefit from placements with local companies. During the inspection, an excellent assembly informed Year 10 students about health and safety issues in the workplace. Students' literacy, numeracy and computer skills, and their understanding of basic finance (through citizenship lessons) are good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

With the strong focus on raising standards, the quality of teaching has improved this year and staffing changes have led to better learning, for example in mathematics. The majority of lessons include a good range of activities and imaginative ways to make learning interesting. Teachers know their subjects well and prepare resources very efficiently. Some teachers are skilled at using interactive whiteboards but governors and senior leaders know that others need more training to exploit the full potential of this modern technology.

Many teachers now refer to assessment data when they plan their lessons, adapt work to match all students' understanding and different abilities and make it clear what students need to do to improve their work. Occasionally, they do not prepare work specifically for high attainers, gifted and talented students or those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school has made the quality of teachers' questioning skills a top priority this year. Increasingly, teachers give students time to answer questions and then respond to their answers with another question to extend their thinking. In lessons where learning is only satisfactory, the pace loses momentum, teachers talk for too long or do not explain tasks clearly enough for students to get going quickly.

The school has a strong reputation for the quality of its teaching in the arts within the local and wider community. The specialism is beginning to influence teaching in other subjects, for example, drama techniques of role-play and hot seating make learning fun and stimulating in humanities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Provision for the arts is very good and students particularly enjoy lessons in these subjects. A parent commented that her daughter's 'creative and academic skills had been nurtured and developed'. Participation in extra-curricular activities is good. The extensive arts community programme is popular. The school arranges several interesting activities specifically for gifted and talented students, particularly in the arts, sports and science.

Students have a good choice of vocational and academic subjects in Years 10 and 11, structured into combinations to suit their different abilities and interests. Around the school, numerous displays about citizenship topics and their links with all subjects help students to appreciate this subject's relevance to their lives.

For the few students who find it difficult to cope with the full curriculum, the headteacher has introduced practical activities, such as horticulture, where they can succeed. Such alternative courses, and more vocational subjects, will be built into the curriculum in the future along with changes to the balance of subjects in Years 7 to 9. The school is well prepared to deliver diplomas in partnership with other schools in the local federation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Arrangements for pastoral care are very effective. A parent wrote that the school 'has a wonderful team of receptionists and student welfare staff'. Students speak highly of the support they receive from their form tutors and learning coordinators and from the new 'Guidance and Support' team. It has very strong links with a wide range of external agencies. The impact of its work is seen in the reduction of fixed-term exclusions and the high quality care for looked after children and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, for the latter group, the school has rightly identified the need for more support in the classroom.

Transition arrangements from primary schools are planned well. Guidance when students choose their option subjects for Years 10 and 11 is good. The school has achieved an award for its high quality careers advice. Most students proceed to further education.

Attendance is below the school's target. The school has established new practices which are successfully addressing this. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are comprehensive and fully up-to-date. The checking system for newly appointed staff and other adults is outstandingly efficient.

In all subjects, students have targets which are challenging but realistic. They know how well they are doing as standards and progress are tracked systematically. Most students are aware of what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has tackled underachievement head on and inspired teachers to aim high. Senior and middle leaders know what they are expected to deliver and have responded to the challenge enthusiastically. Standards and progress have improved. A parent wrote that 'The headteacher has re-energised the school.' Students comment that they appreciate his open-door policy and seeing him around the school.

The governing body realises that, in the past, it did not probe whether standards and achievement were high enough. Following training on data analysis, governors now understand, for example, that in 2008, Year 11 boys should have done better in their

GCSEs. The chair of governors observes that governors are 'right up to our elbows now' and blending loyal support with probing questions.

The harmonious school is a cohesive community that reflects the high profile given to equality of opportunity. Parents attend evening classes and have regular email contact with tutors and other staff. Excellent links with the local community, through the arts, work with primary schools and further education providers and businesses, all contribute to students' personal development.

Students have many opportunities to learn about other faiths, traditions and cultures in many subjects and in well-prepared assemblies. An enjoyable assembly on chocolate highlighted the philanthropic work of the founder of a famous chocolate company. Work in humanities and links with international schools broaden students' horizons but their knowledge and understanding of life in communities elsewhere in the United Kingdom is less developed.

The headteacher has used a budget surplus to appoint additional teaching and non-teaching staff. The positive impact on students' well-being and progress is clear. Students' access to computers will improve in the next academic year as several much-needed new computer suites are ordered.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	2
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

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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



June 11 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Cavendish School, Eastbourne BN21 1UE

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We much enjoyed talking to many of you and wish we had had more time to meet all of you. Yours is a good school and you achieve well in your work. You told us that Mr Fitzpatrick has done lots of good things in his first year and we agree with you. Most importantly, he realised that GCSE results could be better and made sure that Year 11 students were really well prepared to sit their examinations. You are taught well so there is nothing to stop you doing even better in the future.

We were impressed with the number of you who take on responsibilities, such as being members of the school council, and it is clear that your views on school life are valued. You certainly benefit from the school's arts specialism which means that you can enjoy art and design, dance, drama and music lessons and get involved in the local community.

All schools have things that could be better! We have asked your school to improve the homework that you are given and to set it regularly. We have also asked teachers to make sure they prepare work specifically for those of you who find some lessons either too difficult or too easy.

We hope that all of you will have a good summer when the holidays arrive and that your future lives will be successful and happy.

Yours faithfully

Clare Gillies
Lead inspector