

The Chauncy School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117551
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	312649
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Paula Heaney 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	881
6 th form	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Robert Watson
Headteacher	Mr Dennis O'Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	15–18 March 2004
School address	Park Road Ware Hertfordshire SG12 0DF
Telephone number	01920 411200
Fax number	01920 411201

Age group	11–18
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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

The Chauncy is a mixed, comprehensive community school specialising in the visual arts. The school works with five other local schools to provide joint post-16 provision. Standards on entry to the school are broadly average. The school population is predominantly of White British background. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the percentage of students who need extra support with their learning. Students are drawn from a wide cross section of social and economic backgrounds. Attendance in 2007, at 93.4%, was above the national average. The school is a dedicated school for students with physical or neurological impairments. The school achieved the Sports Mark in 2003 and Arts Mark Gold standard in 2005. The school was successfully re-accredited for Investors in People in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Chauncy is a good school with some outstanding features. One parent's comments reflected the views of most, 'Chauncy is a school where children of all abilities are given the chance to succeed and most seem to do well. The whole school from the senior management downwards are very approachable and the teachers always have time for you. The school provides a positive environment for all'. These judgements were endorsed by inspectors.

The excellent leadership and management has resulted in a significant improvement in standards since the previous inspection. The headteacher, senior leaders and school staff have worked tirelessly to raise standards successfully year-on-year and they continue to do so. Outstanding leadership and management permeates throughout the school in a culture where staff are supported to develop their skills and to get the best from their students. Senior managers work very effectively with staff, using detailed information to set challenging targets for students. The headteacher and the managers know the school very well especially its strengths and where further improvements need to be made.

Standards are good, and particularly good between Years 9 and 11 where GCSE results for students gaining five passes grade A*-C, including English and mathematics, were well above the national average. Standards in the sixth form have improved significantly and are good overall, although inconsistent in a small number of subjects. Where there are pockets of underperformance, the school is aware of these and there are already measurable signs of improvement. Students make very good progress overall considering their starting points and most achieve the challenging targets set.

Teaching and learning are good. Most lessons seen were good or better. The best lessons are lively where students are active in their learning and enjoy their studies. Most teachers set a good pace and encourage students to achieve their potential. Students say they feel very well supported by their teachers and other school staff. Teachers, support staff and managers know the students very well and are able to guide and support students of all abilities very effectively. The curriculum is good overall and has been extended to meet students' preferences, including some vocational courses. A wide range of art and design related courses and extra-curricula activities meet students' needs well, although in the sixth form, while a good range of A level subjects are on offer, few vocational courses are available.

The personal development and well-being of students is good. Students are encouraged to eat healthily whilst in school, they feel safe and enjoy attending. Their work to support each other in school and in working with local primary schools and in the community is exemplary. Bullying incidents are rare and if they occur, students report they are dealt with very effectively. Good work-related skills are developed. The care, guidance and support for all learners is outstanding as all students are very well supported to achieve their potential. Very careful tracking and monitoring of students takes place and a range of support is put in place to help students who may need extra help or guidance. This has been very effective in raising standards in the school overall.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form has grown significantly since the previous inspection. Recruitment and retention of students is good. Links with the local federation of schools broaden the range of A level subjects, though the range of vocational courses remains limited. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The new head of sixth form, working closely with the previous leader, already understands the strengths and areas for development. The general studies course has already been improved to set higher expectations of students. There is rigorous tracking of progress and regular feedback and mentoring to support students. Standards have been improving year-on-year and overall are good. Teaching is good and students make good progress. Students are very positive about the sixth form. Students are good role models and play a role in school life through such activities as mentoring younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the sixth form curriculum and extra-curricula activities further to meet the needs of the growth in student numbers and range of ability.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards have risen since the last inspection, significantly so in some respects. The standards students reach by the end of Year 9 are at the national average, and better in English. By the time students reach the end of Year 11 standards improve significantly to well above the national average with 61% gaining five or more GCSEs at A*-C including English and mathematics in 2007. Students gain higher grades at around the national average, with girls outperforming boys in this respect. In the sixth form, standards have improved and are good overall. The performance in sociology, general studies and business studies was below expectations in 2007.

Students make very good progress overall at the school, given their starting points. The 2007 results show particularly good progress in English in Years 7 to 9 and in mathematics in Years 10 to 11. Progress and achievement in the sixth form is good. Students who need extra support with their learning achieve well because of the very good support they receive. Progress seen in lessons was good. Almost all targets were met or exceeded in 2007. School data indicates that standards and achievement are expected to rise overall. The improvements in both standards and achievement are a testament to the outstanding commitment and work by staff to support students in reaching their potential.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Attendance is above average because students enjoy school and want to do well. Students are polite and friendly. They feel confident to ask for help if they need it. The vast majority behave very well. Bullying

is rare. The school takes the issue very seriously and students say it is dealt with 'really well' if it happens.

Students understand how to lead healthy lives. Large numbers take part in sporting activities and eat healthily. They have a good understanding of the issues related to sex, drugs and smoking. In lessons and around the school students behave safely. They are keen to take on responsibilities. Year 7 students much appreciate the help they get from sixth form 'peer mentors' and 'buddies'. Support for the local community is outstanding. Students help in local primary schools, tidy wildlife areas, paint community halls and organise entertainment for elderly citizens during the very successful annual 'community days'. They are very keen to organise charity fund-raising activities. The good standards achieved by students, combined with positive attitudes and keenness to do well, ensure they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall with some outstanding lessons seen on inspection. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively. A range of different teaching styles ensures that students are involved actively in most lessons and enjoy learning. Students commented that they enjoy the opportunity to try a range of learning methods, which helps them achieve well. Students' enjoyment and positive attitudes towards their studies contribute well to the progress they make. Most lessons are planned and organised well to meet the needs of individual students and to challenge the most able. In the very small minority of less successful lessons, the pace of learning was slower and the lessons lacked variety. A particular strength of the school is the very positive and pro-active way in which staff and students work together. Students commented on the very good working relationships they have with their teachers. Very good tracking and monitoring of progress and performance ensure that students know how to improve. The best examples of marking are frequent, thorough and provide a clear indication to students of how to improve their work. In a small minority of examples seen, students are not always provided with regular, positive feedback on completed work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school provides good opportunities for all students to progress, for example, students begin their Year 10 studies at the end of Year 9. Since the last inspection, the curriculum has improved considerably and a broader range of courses is offered, particularly in arts subjects. Changes made have been in response to students' needs and requests. A partnership with a local college enables effective work related learning programmes to be offered in Years 10 and 11. There is a good range of enrichment activities, such as arts workshops, sports and clubs, which are well attended. In the sixth form, however, opportunities for enrichment are limited. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students' personal development with a programme of careers education, ensuring that students are prepared well for their future, working lives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an extremely supportive and caring ethos in which all students receive the help and guidance they need to do well. Excellent induction procedures ensure Year 7 students settle quickly and happily into school. Vulnerable students are identified quickly and receive excellent support. Strong links are forged with parents and parenting classes are much appreciated. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and reviewed regularly. Students say they feel safe and there is always someone to help them. One student said 'teachers are really supportive, just like our friends'. The school uses a wide range of external support agencies to ensure individual needs are met. Support for students who need extra support with their learning is outstanding. Their progress is carefully monitored and they find 'coaching sessions' very helpful. Individual education plans are thoughtfully written and include helpful advice for teachers, students and parents. Consequently, students are enabled to achieve well. Systems for monitoring students' academic progress are excellent. They are backed up by regular individual review meetings, which means that students always know how well they are doing and how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding because they are focused very successfully on raising standards and promoting the well-being and achievement of all students. The excellent leadership and management has resulted in a significant improvement in standards since the previous inspection. The headteacher inspires confidence and provides clear and decisive leadership. He sets high standards and has created a common purpose among staff and leaders alike. The school runs very well on a daily basis. The senior leadership team is strong and, together with middle managers, has led sustained improvement. Their rigorous and systematic monitoring of performance to meet challenging targets is outstanding. Self evaluation is outstanding. Student data is used very effectively by leaders and teachers to ensure all students achieve as they should. This has been the driving force behind the year-on-year improvements in standards and achievement.

The quality of the school's promotion of equal opportunities is good. Leadership and managers at all levels are committed to ensuring that every student gets the very best chance of succeeding. Staff recruitment and retention is good. Professional development is used well to train staff and build capacity. The school makes very good use of resources. Resources for ICT are good. Leadership has been effective in developing and promoting the school's specialist status and, within the limits of the budget, improving accommodation.

The governing body is effective in the exercise of its responsibilities. It has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. There has been some recent restructuring and appointment of a new chair. Governors ensure that they continue to challenge critically and support the school at all levels.

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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?	2	2
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage		
The effectiveness of boarding provision		
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	2	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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.

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	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	2	
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	

14 March 2008



Dear Students

Inspection of The Chauncy School, Ware, SG12 0DP

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. Firstly, I would like to thank you for your openness and cooperation during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that yours is a good school with some outstanding features. It is very well managed. Results have improved year on year. The results at the end of Year 9 are meeting standards achieved nationally and are better in English. GCSE results are well above the national average. You are making good progress overall from your starting points and very good progress between Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form, your standards are good overall, but are variable in a small number of subjects. The school is aware of this.

Most lessons we saw were good or better. These were interesting and challenging, with a good range of activities which you clearly enjoyed. Your teachers and other school staff support you very well to get you to achieve to the best of your abilities. You particularly enjoy a variety of activities and learning that are fun. Your attendance is good and your behaviour was very good. You appreciate very much the approachability of staff and the support they give you which helps you achieve. We were particularly impressed with the support you give one another in helping to settle into the school and in helping to overcome any problems.

We have asked your headteacher to broaden the range of courses and the extra-curricula opportunities offered in the sixth form.

We wish you well with your future studies. Keep up the good work!

Best wishes

Paula Heaney
HM Inspector