

Dorothy Stringer High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114580
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	338408
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Christine Jones 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1650
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Hook
Headteacher	Mr T Allen
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 40 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence including the school's evaluation and development plans, information about students' performance and questionnaires completed by staff, students and 199 parents.

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

- the overall quality of students' learning and progress
- the effectiveness of teaching in meeting students' learning needs
- the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education by senior leaders.

Information about the school

Dorothy Stringer High School is much larger than most secondary schools. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds, but most are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The school is a specialist sports and training school. Amongst many other awards, the school has gained Artsmark gold and the British Council's international school award. The headteacher was absent at the time of the inspection and his role was being covered by a deputy headteacher acting as headteacher.

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

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Dorothy Stringer High School is a high performing sports college and training school that provides its students with an outstanding educational experience clearly focused on the rounded development of the whole student. The overwhelming majority of parents strongly support the school's consistently high expectations of their children. They also feel the school is 'safe and happy' and are 'impressed by the commitment of the staff'.

Students enter the school with above average prior attainment and make good progress during their time in the school to reach high standards. In 2009, the GCSE examination results improved for the tenth successive year and most students now gain five or more A* to C grades. This includes a large majority gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. The school's emphasis on a caring, inclusive ethos results in almost all groups of students achieving equally well. Most students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress because of the very good individual support they receive.

Students enjoy their education and are eager to take part in, and contribute to, the life of the school and the wider community. Most students take part in activities that range from dance and music productions to running a weekly 'Cameroon Café' in support of a school in Africa. The school's specialist sports status makes a major contribution to their personal development and nearly all older students gain a sports focused award such as Junior Sports Leaders where they can support local primary schools.

Students are in no doubt that the school takes extremely good care of them. They have a clear view of their own safety and that of others, especially when using the narrow staircases. Regular attendance and good behaviour in lessons make a strong contribution to learning and students are confident that 'any issues of behaviour are soon sorted out'. Most students demonstrate an excellent understanding of the factors important for a healthy lifestyle and many benefit from the wealth of sports activities available. As one parent commented, 'The sports side of things is excellent and encourages the children to stay fit and healthy.'

Good and sometimes outstanding teaching results in good learning where students are engaged and interested in the wide variety of well-planned activities. Effective subject specialists use their skills well to enthuse and challenge their students while developing and consolidating learning. Where good use is made of assessment

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strategies, teachers make sure that their students know where they are in their learning and the next steps they have to take. However, this practice is not consistent across all teachers and not all work is as carefully marked and assessed. Designated training school status is used to good effect and most teachers are trained mentors. Staff make good use of the development opportunities available through the school's active involvement in local and regional training opportunities.

The school takes outstanding care of the students through a total commitment to all aspects of care, guidance and support. The skilful deployment of staff and resources enables most students in this large school to achieve their full potential. The school provides a highly personalised outstanding curriculum that enables students to develop their skills to excellent levels as well as gaining high GCSE grades. An impressive array of subjects is offered to older students including some more unusual options such as GCSE psychology and AS-level philosophy and ethics. The school makes very successful efforts to ensure that all students get their preferred individual option choices.

The quality of education has improved under good leadership. Parents and carers are kept exceptionally well informed about their children's progress through the school's good communications systems. The school is highly committed to working in partnership with other agencies. This makes an excellent contribution to students' overall achievement and well-being and supports very vulnerable individual students to attend school successfully. There is good capacity for further improvement as the leadership team has an accurate picture and understanding of the school's strengths and knows what needs to be done to improve performance further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Disseminate existing good assessment practice and ensure all staff use assessment strategies consistently so that:
 - students' work is carefully and regularly marked
 - students understand the levels they are reaching and know what they need to do to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Students' achievement is outstanding and attainment is high overall. Alongside the continuing upward trend in students gaining five A* to C grades, the percentage gaining the highest A* and A grades in their GCSE examinations in 2009 was the best ever achieved and was well above average. The number of students gaining five A* to G GCSE grades has also improved significantly over the last three years and is now above average. This is largely due to changes to curriculum provision that improved access and achievement for less able students. Students make good progress and are interested in and enthusiastic about their lessons. They are keen to do their best and say that in their school 'learning is cool'. Students especially enjoy those lessons where they are actively involved, and are very appreciative of the hard

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work of their teachers in taking excellent care of them. While progress is good overall, the school is working hard to help the few students who are given support for their behaviour as their progress is not as good as that made by other students with specific learning needs.

Students' positive attitudes are well supported by good relationships with teachers that allow students to respond very positively to the challenges set. Students are very generous in their support for each other, bullying is seen to be very rare and is dealt with quickly and effectively. Students work well together in a very harmonious community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and felt by the students to be central to the life of the school. As a result of outstanding achievement, good attendance and very effective work-related programmes, virtually every student gains excellent life skills and goes on to education, training or employment.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Good quality teaching maintains high levels of challenge in lessons and good pace that keeps students on their toes and focused on their learning. Outstanding lessons are planned to stimulate students' thinking about the way they learn and teachers then put this into action supported by the very creative use of resources. For example, information and communication technology (ICT) is used extremely well to support learning by both teachers and students. Where lessons are not as good, teachers do not share the objectives of the lesson with the students, talk too much

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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and the pace of learning is slow. Staff know their students very well and most use regular assessments to track progress carefully and identify underachievement. The written feedback provided to students is inconsistent. Where there is good and outstanding practice, successful areas of the work are clearly highlighted, the standard of the work is made clear and is followed by good guidance on how to improve. However, in some cases work is marked infrequently and feedback is too brief with little advice given. As a consequence, those students have limited understanding of the standard of their work or how it can be improved.

The outstanding curriculum offered by the school is significantly enhanced by the extensive range of activities outside of lessons. One parent commented that ‘the sheer range and frequency of extra-curricular activities is inspiring’. These activities are very well attended and nearly all students are involved.

The welfare of students is monitored very carefully. Staff make every effort to get to know their students as individuals and work both with families and agencies to ensure all students receive support and any help they might need. Transition from primary schools is particularly successful and several parents commented on the ease with which their children settled in to their new school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
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 acting headteacher, with good support from the effective senior leadership team, is very successful in leading the school during the headteacher’s absence. There is a clear focus on improving provision while retaining and building on the very successful aspects of the school that are producing such outstanding outcomes for the students. This is reflected in whole-school development planning and the ‘Raising Achievement Plan’ is tightly focused on student outcomes. Middle leaders are growing in confidence and many are rising to the challenge of holding their teams to account for the achievement and well-being of students. Good self-evaluation draws on a wide range of information to focus on key priorities for improvement.

Performance targets are challenging, closely monitored and now met in all areas through recent improvements in performance in physical education. The governors are giving good support and are determined that the school should continue to grow and develop and not stand still. They are reflective and always consider and evaluate the most effective way they can work with the school.

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Any form of discrimination is clearly not tolerated in this school and equality of opportunity is promoted very effectively. This is evident in the good progress made by vulnerable students with complex physical and learning needs. As part of the high quality care the school takes of the students, robust procedures are in place to ensure their safety and all current legal requirements are met.

Strong links with the local and wider community make a valuable contribution to community cohesion and the school has established a good reputation in this area. This is supported by a strong commitment to successful partnership working in a wide variety of settings that makes an excellent contribution to students' achievement and well-being.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers who returned a response was low in comparison with most secondary schools. The response was strongly supportive of the effectiveness of the school across a wide range of its work. Most parents felt their child was making enough progress in the school and that they were happy with their child's experience in the school. A few parents were concerned that the school was not giving them enough help to support their child's learning but there was little evidence that these were widespread concerns.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dorothy Stringer 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 199 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1650 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	88	43	104	53	3	2	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	91	46	103	52	4	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	77	39	96	48	13	7	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	41	96	48	12	6	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	77	39	108	55	3	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	55	28	112	57	20	10	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	50	25	126	64	16	8	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)	78	39	89	45	9	5	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	69	35	105	53	10	5	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	68	34	104	53	9	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	57	29	114	58	12	6	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	93	47	94	47	6	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	118	60	71	36	6	3	1	1

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.



11 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Dorothy Stringer High School, Brighton, BN1 6PZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting you. We were particularly impressed by the pride you take in your school. This letter is to tell you what we found; you may also like to read the full report.

- Dorothy Stringer is an outstanding school.
- Your achievement is outstanding; you make good progress and reach high standards that are well above those seen nationally by the end of Year 11.
- You told us that you enjoy school and that most students behave well. We could see this for ourselves and were impressed by the good atmosphere and how polite and mature you were.
- You tell us you feel very safe in the school and learn a lot in your lessons when they are lively and interesting. You come to school regularly and on time.
- You make an excellent contribution to the school and are keen to take on responsibilities. A large number of you are involved in activities both in school and beyond.
- The excellent curriculum helps you with this and many of you take part in the wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities.
- The school cares for you very well. Many of you told us that the staff know and support you as individuals and that you are confident to turn to them if you need help.
- Your teachers are keen to help you do your best and plan lessons that will keep you interested and help you to learn successfully. Teachers do not always mark your work regularly or tell you enough about the standard of your work and how to improve.
- The headteacher and his staff work hard to make sure you achieve the best you can.

We have asked the school to look at the following area to help you to do even better:

- Make sure all teachers mark your work regularly and help you to understand the levels you are reaching and to know what to do to improve your work.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Christine Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

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