

The Ellowes Hall School Specialist Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103871
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	308443
Inspection dates	15–16 April 2008
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	916
Sixth form	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr G Marsh
Headteacher	Mr A S Griffiths
Date of previous school inspection	22–25 November 2004
School address	Stickley Lane Lower Gornal Dudley DY3 2JH
Telephone number	01384 817915
Fax number	01384 817916

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	15–16 April 2008
Inspection number	308443

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three Additional Inspectors. HMI visited the school in November 2006 to evaluate standards and the quality of provision in design and technology (DT). Standards were judged above average as a result of teaching that was good and sometimes outstanding. The curriculum was good and leadership and management were judged outstanding.

Description of the school

The school is of average size and has a small sixth form. It gained specialist sports status in 2004 and is oversubscribed. The number on roll has declined because of falling rolls in the local authority. Most students are of White British origin. A very small proportion are of Asian, Black or mixed backgrounds. The percentage claiming free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is slightly below average. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is broadly average. However, a significant minority of students enter with below average speaking, reading and writing skills.

The school has gained Artsmark Silver, Leading Parent Partnership, Eco School and Financial Standard in Schools awards and Healthy School accreditation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Ellowes Hall is a good school that is well placed to improve further. The school's mission statement sums up what this school is all about: raising achievement and aspirations through high expectations and by providing an all-round education. The school's leaders fulfil their mission in full. At the heart of this success is the very effective leadership provided by the headteacher. When he took over the school in 2004, he and the governors set out to really challenge the young people. They wanted to raise the sights of students, staff and parents as to what could be achieved, and to remove barriers, particularly the apathy to learning that had been hindering success. Good teaching, an effective curriculum and strong and effective leadership at all levels have led to results rising steeply, especially in Year 11. Students' aspirations have been lifted and it is now 'cool' to gain a qualification rather than not. The chair of governors now sees the hall packed with parents at consultation evenings rather than half empty suggesting that parents want to be involved in the learning process. Students say the school is a very different place from a few years ago. They are effusive in their praise of what staff do to ensure they succeed. One student summed up the views of the majority by saying, 'The school and the people in it help to make learning a really personal and positive experience.' Leaders are not frightened to take risks or innovate to raise standards and increase students' enjoyment. It is a school that learns from its mistakes as well as its successes. Data are used well to inform intervention and eradicate underachievement. However, the tracking of students' progress is not yet robust enough and the school lacks a consistent approach to analysing performance data.

Standards in the current Year 11 are above average, but they are below average in Year 13. Students' achievement is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. There has been a remarkable increase of over 40% in the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades or their equivalent since 2004. There has also been an impressive 30% rise in the numbers reaching this threshold, including English and mathematics, over the same period. The school received recognition for its excellent performance from the local MP in January 2008. Good examination results in subjects such as DT, art and design and some vocational subjects have also helped raise standards at the end of Year 11. Whilst sixth formers' progress is satisfactory, it has accelerated well in the past academic year. English results are rising in each phase but many students lack fluency and confidence when speaking. Spelling and punctuation skills are insufficiently developed and this is restricting achievement. Presentation of work is inconsistent. Not enough attention is yet being paid to developing literacy skills in all subjects.

Teaching is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. Teachers have good subject expertise and generally set challenging and worthwhile tasks. Relationships in class are good. Where teaching is satisfactory, it is mainly because insufficient use is made of assessment information to ensure work is properly matched to students' differing capabilities. The leadership recognises that students are not yet taking enough responsibility for what and how they learn because most lessons are too teacher led. A good curriculum in the main school and an increasingly effective one in the sixth form are helping to raise standards at a fast pace. Sports status has improved the breadth of provision in Years 10 and 11, with extended sports qualifications such as leadership awards enhancing learning. There has been

some improvement in sports facilities. For example, the fitness suite is of good quality. Nevertheless, sports facilities are inadequate overall and are hindering students' skills development and hampering innovation. Students are well cared for and are effectively safeguarded. They receive a good range of academic and personal guidance in each phase.

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Since the last inspection, provision for spiritual development has improved from unsatisfactory to good. The rejuvenation of chaplaincy combined with good opportunities within religious education (RE), humanities, English and the arts has increased students' understanding of cultural and religious diversity. However, acts of collective worship are not held on a daily basis. Students enjoy school and their behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. Attendance is much improved and is now broadly average.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory quality of education. It has improved rapidly since 2004, when it was judged inadequate. The inadequate designation was removed in 2006, because leadership, governance and teaching quality were much better. Students mainly enter the sixth form with below average attainment, because many higher attaining students continue their studies elsewhere. Standards vary from above to below average depending on the subject taught, but are below average overall. Standards are steadily rising. For example, the pass rate at A2 level was 100% in 2007. Results should be treated with caution, as the numbers on many courses are small. Students make satisfactory progress overall and sometimes good progress, particularly in BTEC PE, art and RE. A significant minority have underdeveloped communication skills that hinder their progress in examinations. The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. It builds well on the provision made in Years 10 and 11. Students are able to combine a mix of vocational qualifications with traditional academic subjects. Course offers are carefully tailored to individual needs and aspirations. The sixth form has an effective partnership with a local college, which widens the range of courses available.

Teaching ranges from good to satisfactory and is satisfactory overall. The most effective teaching is characterised by high levels of challenge, good pace and probing questioning that quickens students' learning. However, assessment information is not always used effectively to match tasks to the needs of all groups. Progress has been made in helping students to become more independent and more lessons include opportunities for students to collaborate, but opportunities to develop these skills are inconsistent. Students receive good guidance and this is reflected in the rising numbers entering Year 13. Students' personal development is good and they have various opportunities to make a difference in school and the wider community. For example, they act as mentors for younger students and lead assemblies for the lower school. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and good in several respects. The head of sixth form is setting a clear educational direction leading to improvement. Governors have a good oversight of provision and monitor developments well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' speaking and writing skills, particularly their spelling, punctuation and presentation of work, and develop these skills in all subjects.
- Raise standards and accelerate students' progress in the sixth form by further improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Increase students' independence by encouraging them to take more responsibility for what and how they learn.
- Improve the tracking and analysis of students' progress and sports facilities and ensure daily acts of collective worship are held.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. The progress made by those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is no different from their peers in each phase. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average, but they are below average in Year 13. Standards at the end of Year 11 have risen sharply since 2004. There has been a marked rise in attainment since July 2007, when an average percentage of students achieved five or more A* to C GCSE grades or their equivalent. The improvement has arisen because students' progress in English has accelerated along with boys' achievement. The percentage of students achieving five or more A* to G grades is average. Again, there has been steady improvement in the proportion of students achieving these grades. This demonstrates that the less able are being appropriately challenged.

In 2007, standards at the end of Year 9 were average. Current standards are slightly above average in English and mathematics, with students making at least satisfactory or better progress in both subjects. Results in English have risen from below to above average because of improved teaching and better leadership of the subject. Challenging and relevant targets are set at the end of each phase.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are friendly and welcoming. They are well behaved because the school's discipline code is implemented effectively and they are motivated by the good reward system. Students say they feel safe, secure and are free from harassment. Specialist status has been effective in enabling students to adopt a healthy lifestyle and the school has received an award for its work. A high proportion of students participate in sports-related activities. Results of a health survey indicate they have a good awareness of drugs and sexual health matters. Students make a good contribution to the school and wider community. For example, they have improved the school uniform, toilets and lunch menus. Senior students act as mentors to younger ones and prefects have organised the school prom, annual senior citizens' party and charity fundraising events. Enterprise skills are developed very well through a wide and exciting range of community and business projects that improve the environment and students' business acumen. For example, one group has developed a local nature reserve and another has made a healthy profit selling chocolate truffles. Enterprise work prepares students well for the adult world. Attendance has markedly improved and is now satisfactory. The improvement has been brought

about by sustained effective action on a number of fronts. Nevertheless, a small minority of students do not attend regularly enough.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves are good. Students are keen to learn, work hard and give of their best because lessons are worthwhile and time is used well. Teachers use video, interactive whiteboards and other resources effectively to stimulate learning and make work interesting. Lessons generally move along at a good pace and time is used productively. Work is mostly challenging and teachers extend students' knowledge and understanding through well structured questions that really make them think. Because work is often teacher directed there are too few opportunities for students to take responsibility for their learning and gain independence through posing their own questions, research and debate. Teachers do not always place sufficient emphasis on developing students' speaking, writing and presentation skills. Where teaching is satisfactory, particularly in the sixth form, it is mainly because assessment information is not used well enough to plan work that meets the differing needs of students. Marking and students' self-assessments provide a clear and accurate picture of the standards achieved and what must be improved.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Leaders have tailored the curriculum to meet the needs of particular individuals. For example, a group of Year 10 students who found learning difficult were given intensive English and mathematics support that resulted in them gaining GCSEs in both subjects a year early. Success has boosted their self-esteem and they have remained engaged and motivated when previously they might well have dropped out of school or underachieved. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad, balanced and based mainly on the National Curriculum programmes of study. Sports status has enriched provision. Improved achievement in sport has made a difference to students' outlook, performance and attitudes to learning, not only in PE but in other subjects too. Further innovation is hampered by inadequate sports facilities. For example, there is no adequate sports hall, the surfaces of outdoor grassed and hard areas hinder skills development, and changing facilities are poor.

Design and technology provision and the enterprise work done in Year 10 are particular strengths of the school. The Prime Minister has recognised the innovative work done in enterprise. However, inspectors found that time was not always being used wisely in tutorial periods. The introduction of Mandarin in the sixth form business course, coupled with a trip to China, is effectively enhancing students' cultural and linguistic skills. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is offered, including cultural trips to Tanzania and Jordan.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff take real care and a pride in making the environment an attractive one in which to live and learn. For example, teachers' displays are of good quality as they celebrate students' work and achievement. The caretaking and cleaning staff work diligently to keep the premises and buildings clean and tidy.

Good pastoral and academic support is provided for all students. Effective and impartial guidance is given to Year 11 students to ensure individuals make the right further education or employment choices after age 16. The leadership recognises that insufficient support is being provided to improve students' oral, literacy and independence skills across the curriculum. The student support centre is effective in providing a 'one-stop-shop' for a wide range of external agencies, including Connexions, the health adviser, school counsellor, chaplain and police. Students at risk are identified early, and can access the necessary support right on their own doorstep.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior leaders, middle managers and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because self-evaluation procedures are robust. Good use has been made of outside expertise to evaluate provision. Weaknesses in provision have been pursued with vigour and remedied. This approach has been particularly effective in raising standards and improving provision in English.

Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Results have turned around; sixth form provision has markedly improved and teaching is much better. Morale in the school is high and there is a real sense of teamwork to achieve the school's aims. The headteacher has led from the front and has been ably supported by his deputy and chair of governors. Links with parents are strong and the school has gained an award for its work with them. Governors do a good job in holding the school to account and have ensured that all but one of their statutory duties are fulfilled. Acts of collective worship are not held daily.

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	16–19
---	-----------------------	--------------

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	3
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?	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

17 April 2008

Dear Students



Inspection of The Ellowes Hall School Specialist Sports College, Dudley, DY3 2JH

As you know, inspectors visited your school recently. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found out. We enjoyed meeting you and thank you for the tour of the school on the first morning. We welcomed your friendliness, politeness and honesty when answering our questions. Inspectors judge that you go to a good school.

These are the things we found out about your school.

- Your school is improving at a fast pace because the headteacher, senior staff and governors are providing good leadership. Mr Griffiths is a very effective leader and you welcome seeing him around the school on a day-to-day basis.
- You make good progress and are now attaining above average standards by the time you leave Year 11. This is because you are well taught and the curriculum in Years 7 to 11 meets your personal and academic needs well.
- As inspectors walked through the front entrance they could feel the positive ethos. You and the administrative staff look so smart in your new uniforms and the caretaking and cleaning staff really look after the place.
- Sports and enterprise work is making a difference. It was good to see that many more of you were taking exercise and this was improving your health and fitness, and boosting your self-esteem and self-confidence.
- You told us you really enjoy school. One student summed up the views of the majority when they said, 'The school and the people in it help to make learning a really personal and positive experience.'
- Your behaviour is good and you have very positive attitudes to learning. It was good to hear that the vast majority of you are now attending regularly.

The school must do four things to improve further.

- Improve your speaking and writing skills, particularly your spelling, punctuation and presentation of work, and develop these skills in all subjects.
- Raise standards and accelerate sixth formers' progress by further improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Give you more opportunities to be independent, through teachers encouraging you to take more responsibility for what and how you learn.
- Improve the tracking and analysis of your progress and ensure a daily act of collective worship is held. Parents and students say sports facilities are not good enough, and inspectors agree.

Best Wishes
David Rzeknik
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools