

The Crypt School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115755
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312056
Inspection dates	27–28 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	742
Sixth form	173

Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard James
Headteacher	Jonathan Standen
Date of previous school inspection	23–27 February 2004
School address	Podsmead Gloucester GL2 5AE
Telephone number	01452 530291
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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 Crypt School is a grammar school with a specialist status in science. The students attending are mainly from the city of Gloucester but others travel from the surrounding area. Many students attend the school from areas of higher than average socio-economic deprivation. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, or who are learning English as an additional language, are lower than average. The small sixth form works closely in a post-16 consortium with other schools and admits girls and students from other city schools. The headteacher took up post in September 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Crypt is a good school which provides outstanding care, guidance and support to students so that they make good progress and achieve consistently and exceptionally high standards. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding and they behave superbly well. Students are rightfully proud of their school and they enjoy their work. As one said, 'the best thing about our school are the teachers because they make learning fun and we really enjoy ourselves.' The school is particularly successful in raising the aspirations and achievement of students, many of whom become the first in their families to go on to higher education.

The highly effective headteacher sets a clear direction to the work of the school. He is well supported by the senior leadership team. Issues identified in the last inspection regarding the leadership of the school have been remedied so that now the leadership of the school is good and holds subject leaders to account for their areas. The school has a very effective system to evaluate the work of departments and year teams. Subject leaders regularly monitor specific elements of the students' learning, such as the quality of work within books. These evaluations then feed into the whole-school evaluation, as well as identifying areas for the department to work on together and improve. This has meant provision has improved and progress by students has quickened. Governance is good and ensures the school makes good use of its resources.

Students achieve well, with their outstanding academic guidance making sure that most meet challenging targets. Results in science are very good and standards in French have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Two thirds of the students in Year 10 study a modern foreign language, which reflects students' confidence in the subject. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are weak compared to other subjects. Students make insufficient progress in lessons and across time because the teaching of ICT is not challenging enough.

Students respond well to good teaching, relationships between staff and students are very good and lessons are challenging. Students' ability to work independently are less developed because many lessons are led too much by the teacher. The curriculum meets the needs of students well and is extended by a large variety of extra-curricular activities, including many physical education activities, and music and science clubs. Students have an exceptional understanding of how to keep healthy. Many of them walk or cycle to school.

The school has made good use of its specialist status to develop the curriculum and raise standards in teaching and learning. It has created smaller teaching groups in Key Stage 4 and nearly all rooms have suitable electronic boards, which many staff use well, whilst others are in the early stages of learning to do so. The school works hard to develop well appreciated and evaluated science links with its partner primary schools. Plans are in place to extend these links with work in modern foreign languages.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good sixth form. Standards on entry to the sixth form are broadly average because some Year 11 students leave to go to other schools and other students who meet the entry requirements of five or more higher level GCSEs join. Students achieve above average standards in their A-level examinations and make good progress. Three quarters of them go on to attend the university of their first choice. Students take pride in their work and often aspire to exceed their challenging targets. The school has worked very well to reduce the number of students who leave during Year 12 or fail to reach high enough standards to continue to Year 13. Previously, a significant number of students left to continue with their studies elsewhere, or start an apprenticeship or a career.

Students' personal development and preparation for future economic well-being are good. They are not outstanding as in the main school because attendance is lower, they do not enjoy school as highly as younger students and there is a lack of opportunity for independent learning. Care, guidance and support are also good rather than outstanding because, although students are now guided well for the appropriate courses they should follow, in the recent past some students have followed inappropriate courses which meant they did not complete their studies.

Students are well rounded and responsible young adults who want to succeed in school and in their future. They display very positive attitudes, keenly take up roles of responsibility and leadership offered in the school, and make a positive contribution to the wider community in a number of significant ways. There are extensive links with local business, and team work and enterprises are promoted well. Business studies students were involved in the interview of the current headteacher last year. Students say that their views about improvements are taken into account.

The quality of provision is good. Teaching is good but work is not always well matched to students' needs. The good curriculum allows students to study A-level courses with opportunities for them to study other courses as part of the consortium. A few students take advantage of this opportunity and the school monitors the quality of this provision well.

The leadership of the sixth form is good. The school has worked very hard to analyse why so many students did not complete their A-level courses. A very comprehensive analysis of Year 12 brought about improved systems for the monitoring of students' progress. Teachers intervene when students are in danger of not succeeding and retention of students within the sixth form is a focus for leadership at all levels within the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in ICT by ensuring teaching challenges students so that they make greater progress.
- Extend the variety of teaching methods by providing greater opportunities for students to work independently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with standards well above the national average but below those normally found in grammar schools. They make good progress in Key Stage 3 to reach exceptionally high standards in their tests at the end of Year 9. Results in science and mathematics are higher than those in English. The school evaluates all subjects and this shows that standards in modern foreign languages have improved significantly since the previous inspection.

In Key Stage 4 students make similar good progress and achieve results which are exceptionally high. Nearly all students gain five or more higher level passes at GCSE, including mathematics and English. Results in 2007 showed that close to a half of the grades in biology, English literature, geography, mathematics and physical education were either A or A* and overall a third of the results were at that high level. Results in ICT are poor. Results in A level show standards above average and students who complete their courses make good progress.

The school met most of its challenging targets including those for its specialist status. There has been a significant improvement in results in science since becoming a specialist school, although results in A-level chemistry are lower than other science subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding because students have a strong sense of right and wrong and exceptional social and moral development. They are thoughtful, reflective and very keen to explore their values with their teachers and each other, hence spiritual development is very strong. Students have good cultural awareness but are not fully aware of the full extent of Britain's cultural diversity. They make an excellent contribution to the community through charity events, supporting primary schools as junior sports leaders and an annual activities week.

Students enjoy school as demonstrated by their excellent attendance and punctuality. Behaviour is of the highest standard with students being extremely polite and courteous to staff, each other and visitors. Students are empathetic with each other and have a high regard for the safety and well-being of others. They feel safe from bullying, racism and any other discrimination.

Students know extremely well how to stay healthy; they are well aware of the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drug abuse. They enjoy extensive sporting opportunities and at breaks and lunchtime many of them play in impromptu games of football or rugby. Very good literacy and numeracy and good problem solving skills are a good preparation for their future economic awareness.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good because teachers have high expectations that reinforce students' high aspirations. Good subject knowledge contributes well to learning so that students make good progress in the majority of lessons. Learning objectives are displayed and shared, often extremely effectively, which help students to understand what, and how, they will learn. In the best lessons reference is made to objectives to check the progress at different stages in the lessons and students know what is expected from them.

Students' positive attitudes, and very good relationships with other students and staff, ensure excellent behaviour in lessons. Students engage willingly and effectively in independent and collaborative learning when provided with opportunities. In less effective lessons teaching is often over-directive and does not sufficiently take into account students' varied learning styles and enhance their independent learning skills.

Lessons are well structured and conducted at a brisk pace with some good challenge for many students, although the teaching of ICT lacks challenge. Teachers know their students well so that work is well matched to students; this is less good in the sixth form. Good questioning helps staff assess students' progress, which often involves students assessing their own or their peers' work. Marking is frequent and generally provides very good feedback on how well students are doing. However, in some books advice is not given on how to improve. Homework is set frequently and is purposeful and relevant. Students say that homework is not too burdensome.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good traditional curriculum meets the needs, aspirations and capabilities of the learners well. The provision for modern foreign languages is good, with Key Stage 3 students studying two modern foreign languages. In Year 7 and Year 8 students take a short course in Mandarin. Citizenship is taught through the personal education curriculum and students know when they are studying it and how well they are doing.

In Key Stage 4 all students follow separate sciences for GCSE. They have opportunities to personalise their curriculum and some follow a vocational courses at a local college.

There are good opportunities to develop work-related learning and financial skills through a variety of activities, for example interviews with local business leaders and an emphasis on problem solving and collaborative work in many lessons. ICT is used effectively in a variety of subjects to support teaching and laptops are used in lessons, particularly in Years 7 and 8. However, students' relatively low ICT skills mean they do not always make best use of it to enhance learning.

There is a comprehensive range of enrichment activities, many promoted through the school's specialist college status. These meet the wide range of students' interests and have a high uptake, particularly in sporting activities and music. There are good opportunities to promote healthy lifestyles through an extensive personal education curriculum and a variety of enrichment activities, including focused events on promoting healthy living.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Excellent pastoral care and highly effective academic guidance ensure students make good progress in the main school. Students are highly effectively supported to make informed choices about which courses to follow in Key Stage 4 and for A level. The school has rectified the weaknesses in guidance that meant some students in the past chose the wrong courses at A level, which they then failed to complete.

Year 7 students spoke very highly of their exemplary induction into the school and valued their weekend residential stay in Dorset. These activities help them to develop their confidence as they get to know other students in their year group. Students who join the school from other schools at the start of the sixth form also speak very highly of their induction. Teachers model respectful attitudes and this results in very good relationships within the school.

Students are set challenging targets. They receive very strong academic monitoring by senior leaders, who know all students well and intervene when students are progressing below expectations. Highly effective support for GCSE examinations, including coursework clinics, helps students to meet their targets in examinations and tests.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection and are good. They continue to improve with the embedding of systems and structures. The headteacher provides dynamic leadership, giving a very clear strategic direction and drive to the school. The senior leadership team is extremely supportive and very effective in holding middle leaders to account for their work within year and subject teams. There are clear structures in place to ensure management at all levels has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The whole-school concentration on remedying the weakness in retention rates at the end of Year 12 has brought about a significant reduction to the number of students who leave at that time.

The school undertakes comprehensive reviews of subject areas and of year teams so that it has an accurate appraisal of its overall effectiveness. The reviews include an accurate analysis of the quality of teaching and learning. Areas noted for improvement are then used by departments to provide professional development for staff. Parents, governors, and students are regularly surveyed for their opinions and these are used to support the accurate self-evaluation. The school has made many improvements since the last inspection; most, but not all, are fully embedded and this demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

Governance is good. Governors support the school well and challenge the school's leaders as appropriate. The committee structure ensures all relevant policies are kept up to date and there is feedback on their impact to the full governing body.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	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?	1	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	2
The attendance of learners	1	2
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	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	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.

Leadership and management

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

Annex B

29 February 2008



Dear Students

Inspection of The Crypt School, Gloucester, GL2 5AE

My colleagues and I visited your school recently, met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were very pleased with your friendliness and helpfulness. We were very impressed with how proud you are of your school, especially its long history, and how it has helped boys from the City of Gloucester.

We think the quality of your care, guidance and support is excellent in the main school and good in the sixth form. It enables you to make good progress and reach especially high standards in your GCSE examinations. We were pleased to see all the work the school is doing to help Year 12 students and make sure they are able to carry on with their A levels in Year 13. Teaching is good with a significant number of lessons being outstanding. Many of you told us you preferred it when lessons were lively and interesting and teachers did not talk for too long, so that you could get down to work quickly and work independently. You said this helped you learn better. We agree and have asked your school to improve the overall quality of lessons by giving you more opportunities to work independently.

We were very impressed with your excellent behaviour and the way in which you concentrate in class. We also feel that you get on really well together because of the mutual respect you have for each other and for your teachers. You have very good literacy and numeracy skills but your information and communication technology (ICT) skills are not as good and we have asked your school to improve these by ensuring ICT lessons are more challenging for you.

Many of you have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and it was nice to see how well you play at breaks and lunchtimes. Your school is well led and managed and it obtains the views of yourselves and your parents to see how it can improve further.

We wish you well in this good and supportive school. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith HMI