

The Summerhill School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 103854 |
| Local Authority | Dudley |
| Inspection number | 308440 |
| Inspection dates | 30–31 January 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Judith Matharu HMI |

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

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|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | 1012 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Graham Knowles |
| Headteacher | Mr Ben Warren |
| Date of previous school inspection | 2–5 February 2004 |
| School address | Lodge Lane Kingswinford West Midlands DY6 9XE |
| Telephone number | 01384 816165 |
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|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Age group | 11–16 |
| Inspection date(s) | 30–31 January 2008 |
| Inspection number | 308440 |

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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 Summerhill School is an above average sized community secondary school serving a relatively prosperous area of Dudley. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The majority of students are of White British origin. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average. The school was awarded specialist languages status in September 2003. It also holds the Investors in People, Artsmark Silver and Sportsmark awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding features. It provides a consistently good standard of education and gives good value for money. Achievement is good and standards are above average overall and improving. The school is taking robust and effective action to raise standards at Key Stage 4 and is well placed to continue this improvement.

Staff and students are rightly proud of their school. Relationships in the school are very good and almost all students enjoy their education. This supportive and safe atmosphere leads to very high levels of attendance. Students' personal development is outstanding. They display excellent behaviour and very positive attitudes towards their learning. Students appreciate the strong contributions they are encouraged to make to many aspects of school life.

Consistently good and challenging teaching enables students to achieve high standards in their work. Lessons are usually lively and stimulating, providing appropriate challenge for all abilities. On occasions, teaching is outstanding. However, such excellent practice is not routinely disseminated across the school. The curriculum is good, being varied and appropriate for all abilities. More able students are suitably challenged by the possibility of taking external exams early. Vocational aspects have continued to develop as have the use and application of information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching and learning. A good range of enrichment days and extra-curricular activities enhance students' experiences and develop excellent work-related skills to prepare students for their future lives.

The school cares for students well and ensures that they feel safe and secure in school. Year heads and tutors are key adults in students' lives and students speak of their confidence in their teachers to help with any difficulties they may encounter. Academic tracking of progress and guidance for students are developing securely.

The headteacher and staff team are strongly committed to continual improvement. Leadership and management are solidly good at all levels and systems to monitor and evaluate the school's effectiveness are generally robust. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning is not as rigorous and systematic as it needs to be to improve teaching to the highest level. Subject leaders' roles in this respect are also underdeveloped.

The specialist status of the school has prompted a number of significant improvements. The use of ICT has improved significantly through better resources and specialist training for teachers. Work to improve the use of assessment to support learning has been sponsored by specialist college funds and is now having a positive impact on lesson planning, leading to the closer match of work to students' needs. The school offers a wide range of foreign languages: French, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Russian. Some are available at 'entry' level, enhancing the range of academic and vocational courses available. There are good links with primary schools; ensuring pupils already have a good foreign language basis on entering Year 7.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share the best practice evident in the school more consistently, in order to improve all teaching and learning to the highest levels.
- Make the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning sharper and more rigorous, and involve subject leaders more fully in this process.

Achievement and standards

Grade 2

Standards are consistently above average. From above average attainment on entry, students achieve standards at the end of Year 9 that are well above the national average. In 2007, Key Stage 3 test results were well above average in all subjects. In particular, results in English significantly improved from 2006 and placed the school at the first percentile of schools nationally. Students make good progress in all subjects at Key Stage 3 and sometimes excellent progress, as in English in 2007.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are also above the national average, although the gap between the school's results and national performance has closed over the past three years. The percentage of students gaining an A*- C grade GCSE in English and mathematics has been well above the national average for the past three years. Progress has been good over time at Key Stage 4, although it slowed to be satisfactory overall in 2007. Although good progress was achieved by both boys and girls in a number of subjects, including mathematics, progress in English was not as strong. In particular, the performance of higher ability girls in English was disappointing and performance in science overall at GCSE was below the school's expectations. The school recognises this and has carefully analysed the contributory factors. A robust action plan has been implemented to tackle the issues. For example, careful analysis of performance data has identified where students would benefit from individual mentoring and this has been successfully and rigorously implemented to good effect. Progress is carefully monitored across all subjects and, where students are underachieving, a range of suitable interventions has been introduced to boost progress.

Because of the school's efforts this year, the progress of current Year 11 students is significantly improved. The monitoring data held by the school confirms that students are on track to achieve more highly in 2008. Progress in science has dramatically improved with current module grades indicating that results will improve this year. Good progress was observed in lessons across all subjects at Key Stage 4 during the inspection. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similarly good progress to others in their year groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Student's moral and social awareness is outstanding. Through the school's status as a language college, its various international links and a culturally inclusive curriculum, their cultural awareness is good, though their understanding of living in a diverse society in Britain is not as secure. Spiritual development is not as strong as moral and social development.

Behaviour is often exemplary in lessons and around the school, and students consistently express confidence in the staff's ability to meet their needs. They act responsibly and with great maturity, and have positive attitudes towards learning. As a result, they thoroughly enjoy the learning experiences offered by the school. Through a number of different student councils, they have a strong and active voice in the management of the school, especially in relation to healthy eating and to environmental matters. They also make a considerable contribution to the wider community, for example through fund raising for a wide range of charities. Students are very positive about the opportunities provided by the school, both in the formal curriculum and through the extensive out of school provision. The majority of students develop a very good understanding of their own emotional health and well-being, and are developing as mature and active citizens. Attendance is well above average. Students' good progress and high standards in basic skills prepare them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers have good subject knowledge. They use assessment information effectively to plan work and ensure that it meets the learning needs of all students. Marking is good, with occasional inconsistencies, and provides good guidance to help students improve their work. Activities in lessons are interesting and challenging and students respond enthusiastically. Teachers use ICT well to enrich students' experiences. For example, they use DVD and interactive whiteboards and ensure students routinely use computers themselves.

Teachers establish excellent working relationships and this contributes significantly to students' learning. In the best instances, lessons are exciting with questioning that stretches students' understanding and makes sure that they explain their knowledge well. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is effective and helps them make good progress.

While there are many significant strengths in teaching, the most effective practice is not always shared effectively enough to lift good teaching to outstanding. For example, in some lessons, even within one subject, students' learning is improved by working in small groups, but this practice is not common enough. The school is in the early stages of sharing its good practice.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a wide and expanding range of subjects. Many students take Key Stage 3 assessments and GCSE examinations early so that they have opportunities to take further subjects. For example, the opportunity to take GCSE mathematics in Year 10 means that students are able to study a statistics course or AS level mathematics in Year 11. All students take two foreign languages at Key Stage 3, a benefit of being a specialist languages college. Provision for ICT is good and better

than at the last inspection. It is continuing to improve with students increasingly being able to access subject websites to help their learning.

Subject content is well planned to meet the needs of all students. However, literacy and numeracy skills are not always fully integrated into planning in different subjects, but the school is aware of this and working to improve it. The wide range of visitors, visits and other activities enrich students' experiences. Many students participate in a good range of out-of-school activities. Vocational education, a weakness at the last inspection, is now good and improving. Students experience a wide range of opportunities to take workplace related courses in languages, engineering and business. The range is set to improve through new links with a consortium of local schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support for students are good. Students say they feel very well cared for and are confident to ask for any help they need, whatever the problem. Students are positive about the effective pastoral system that contributes to the caring ethos of the school. They feel safe in school, supported by the high levels of supervision throughout the day. There are good links with the local authority and other external agencies so that vulnerable students, including looked after children, are well cared for. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are well established and meet statutory requirements. Health and safety checks and risk assessments are conducted on a regular basis, particularly when visits are made out of school.

Careers and further education guidance is a strong feature as part of a good personal, social and health education and citizenship programme with students being engaged in relevant activities from Year 7. The school works hard to raise the students' aspirations. Systems for tracking students' progress are developing. Recently introduced robust procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress and for intervening when weaknesses are identified are beginning to bring improvements. However, these have yet to influence external examination results at Key Stage 4.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides a clear vision for the school that is well articulated, shared and understood by staff. There is a clear aim to challenge each student to fulfil their potential within a warm and supportive environment. The senior team are well organised and work together effectively. The non-teaching staff are led well and contribute strongly to whole-school improvement. There is a very clear understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for action. Consequently, self-evaluation is largely accurate. A sharp focus on raising achievement at Key Stage 4 and the implementation of an appropriate action plan are improving the progress of older students.

Subject leaders contribute strongly to whole-school improvement. They are conscientious and work well with the senior team on strategies for raising achievement. However, their roles in evaluating teaching and learning in their departments, and improving this to the next level, are still underdeveloped. Monitoring of the work of subject and year leaders is extensive. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning is not yet as sharp or structured as it could be.

There is a strong commitment to staff development and training and staff value this supportive environment. Parental satisfaction with the school is high. Governors are well organised, knowledgeable and supportive, yet able to hold the school to account very well, admirably fulfilling their role as 'critical friends'. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and the school's plans and drive to move forward indicate that there is good capacity to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

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| 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

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

Achievement and standards

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 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 disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 1 |
| 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

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| 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 |

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

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| 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 | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 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 | 1 |
| 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 |



4 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Summerhill School, Dudley DY6 9XE

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views of Summerhill. Many of you spoke with pride about your school and we were impressed with your enthusiasm for many of the school's activities.

We found that Summerhill is providing you with a good quality education and, as you rightly identified, there are many features to be proud of. You achieve high standards in tests at the end of Year 9 and, although results at GCSE in 2007 were not as high as the school expected, things are now back on track, as we saw in lessons. The teaching you receive is generally good, and occasionally outstanding. You enjoy warm and supportive relationships with your teachers and you told us that you feel well cared for in school. Most of you behave in an exemplary manner and display mature, responsible attitudes, both in your lessons and around the site. You contribute very strongly to your school's success. This is very impressive, and it results in very positive attitudes to your learning. We noted that you respect and look after your surroundings very well; it helps that they are so bright and attractive! Your school is well led and managed by your headteacher and his team.

A particularly good feature of your school is that it constantly looks for ways to improve. All your teachers want Summerhill School to be outstanding in every respect. We have asked your staff to think about just two things. Firstly, to make sure that the outstanding teaching is shared widely across the whole staff team. Secondly, to make sure that when senior staff and subject leaders observe lessons, they are very clear about the best practice they are looking for. We agree with your teachers that teaching and learning in Summerhill has the potential to become outstanding and we wish you every success in the future.

We look forward to hearing of your progress.

Best wishes

Judith Matharu
Her Majesty's Inspector