

Polesworth Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125736
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	315298
Inspection dates	11 - 12 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Clive Kempton 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	1134
6 th form	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dave Butcher
Headteacher	Andy Clarke
Date of previous school inspection	18 - 22 October 2004
School address	Dordon Road Tamworth Staffordshire B78 1QT
Telephone number	01827 702205
Fax number	01827 702206

Age group	11 - 18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; teaching and learning; care, guidance and support; and, leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation; national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; policies and planning documents; observation of the school at work; interviews with senior members of staff, students, parents and external professionals associated with the school. Parents' questionnaires were also analysed. Other aspects of the school's work, for example students' personal development and well-being, were not investigated in as much detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Polesworth International Language College serves the community of North Warwickshire. It became a Specialist Language College in 2006 and aims to prepare all its students to take their place in a global society. It has grown considerably over the last few years, particularly in the sixth form, which has led to the building of some new accommodation. The school works very closely with local primary schools through the Anker Valley Partnership. It also has links with schools across Europe, Africa and Asia. The school draws students from a wide variety of backgrounds. Attainment on entry is broadly average, although there are variations from year to year with some year groups below average. The student population is almost entirely White British. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average and those eligible for free school meals is below.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Polesworth Language College is an outstanding school, a view shared by parents and students themselves. Parents describe the school as a place where 'students really matter' and where 'students are valued as individuals'. A student described it as 'a big community that works well together'. A unique characteristic of the school is the strength of its relationships. It is led by a charismatic headteacher who has motivated all the staff with his leadership skills and they in turn have risen to the challenge of his vision. On the school's website, the headteacher describes his vision of what makes a good school, 'I look for exciting teaching, a friendly atmosphere, and lots of after school activities. If a school gets these three right, then everything else falls into place; good attendance, high standards of behaviour and exam results of which everyone involved can be proud.' His vision is a reality. He is highly respected by all the students because they all know how much he cares about the school and how much he wants them all to achieve their potential. He is also held in high esteem by the parents, many of whom praised his leadership on the questionnaires received as part of the inspection.

The single-minded focus on raising the achievement of all students, with a particular focus on English and mathematics, has ensured that all pupils make impressive progress from their starting points to reach above average standards in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. This has been the case for the last three years and represents outstanding achievement. The headline figure of five or more GCSE A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is above the national average, as is the average points score of sixth form students. This takes a lot of hard work on the part of the staff and the students.

The right atmosphere is created in the school for learning and achievement to take place. The quality of teaching across the school is good overall. A good majority of teaching staff regularly deliver inspirational lessons. Some of these high quality lessons were observed during the inspection and demonstrated the very good relationships teachers have with their students. These lessons are carefully planned, with clear learning objectives that are shared and regularly checked with the students. Students have lots of learning opportunities through exciting activities in the lessons and are challenged to respond in depth with extended answers. Teachers have high expectations and impressive subject knowledge. Students respond to this high level of teaching with consistently good behaviour and retain a strong focus throughout the lessons. They tangibly respect the teaching staff and enjoy their lessons. This is why attendance at school is above the national average. Students want to be there. There is still some work to do to ensure this high quality is consistent in all the teaching, by expanding the range of questioning strategies used by all staff in lessons. The school accepts that this whole school development point would further raise the quality and consistency of teaching in all lessons.

Students' positive attitudes to learning, their excellent behaviour, their respect for adults, their obvious pride in the school, and the numerous opportunities available for them are contributory factors in their outstanding personal development. A student summed this up, 'The school gives us fabulous opportunities for later in life.' The international dimension of the school supports its language college status well, and has ensured that students develop a very broad understanding of other

countries and cultures. The number of links with other countries for a variety of projects and visits is impressive. Partner schools in Belgium, Germany, Spain, Poland, Ghana, India and China, and supporting a school in Nepal, are just a few examples of the wide range of opportunities students have to develop their understanding of global issues. Students develop their confidence and self-esteem by organising many of the social events in school, such as mass fancy dress for leavers' day, tutor group performances, leavers' assemblies, the school year book, and decorating areas of the school. Senior students also have the opportunity to take on leadership roles as chair and vice chair of the sixth form committee, the school council, or as head boy and head girl. The decisions made by these leaders have real impact on the school and its community. For example, the head girl was invited to join the local police advisory panel to represent young people's views on important community issues.

The school actively promotes a healthy lifestyle through the range of healthy food offered at break time and lunch time, and the wide range of sporting activities available after school. A significant number of students have achieved county and national accolades for their sporting prowess and, indeed, pupils report that 'it is cool to be healthy'. There are some students, however, who elect not to be as healthy and do not choose healthy options. The school's own pupil survey highlights that the vast majority of pupils feel safe in school, that there is little bullying and racism, and any that is identified is taken seriously and resolved quickly with the positive involvement of parents and carers. The 'Ban the Bully' mentoring programme is also appreciated by students.

The richness of opportunities to develop as confident, rounded young men and women is balanced with the academic curriculum. The school's focus on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills is designed to enable students to take their place in society and make a positive contribution to their own economic well-being. This is supported by a good curriculum overall. It is currently no better than good, as information and communication technology as a discrete subject is only just being introduced. Another factor is that the school has made a conscious decision not to pursue vocational options extensively at Key Stage 4 at present. However, it recognises that this will require review to provide students with the option to pursue vocational courses that may be more appropriate to their specific career aspirations.

Staff really do care for the pupils and want them all to succeed. As a result, the care, guidance and support provided for all pupils are exceptional. A strong pastoral system ensures that students have someone they can turn to for advice and help when they need it. This early intervention ensures that external agencies and parents are quickly and appropriately involved. Even in challenging situations, parents appreciate the lengths the school goes to support their children. One parent commented, 'I don't know any other place that could have coped with my son.' Academic support is provided for students who require additional support and it is testament to this support that all groups of pupils achieve very well. Good careers guidance is provided by the on-site service. Outstanding experiences are provided for students to apply for senior roles in school, such as prefects or anti-bully mentors. These applications are sifted externally and students are called for interview or feedback given on their application. This prepares them well for responsibility in adult life.

None of the above can happen without strong leadership and management across the school which is outstanding. The headteacher is supported well by an impressive senior leadership group who work very well together to support the headteacher's vision. New ideas are embraced to challenge thinking and enhance provision, for example the nature and impact of assessment feedback to Key Stage 3 students. Middle managers are committed to raising standards in their own subject areas. A strong feature is the teaching coaching programme, where individual staff identify a peer coach to work with them over a period of time to improve an aspect of their teaching. This process has improved the consistency of teaching across the school. The annual cycle of departmental analysis and review of examination results leads to action-planning following a whole school format. This process ensures that key issues become part of the overall school self-evaluation of its provision and, subsequently, part of the whole school development plan. This development planning, at all levels, is currently a weaker aspect of management, as it is more a list of actions, and does not focus sufficiently on how it will measure the success of these actions. As such, leadership across the school is stronger than management.

The language college status and the new accommodation have raised the profile of modern foreign languages in the school. The first year targets were not all achieved and it is too early to judge the full impact of the specialism across the school. Early signs are very positive, however, with much higher standards achieved in French this year and a tremendously positive response from local primary schools to the weekly French lesson they receive. Some impact is being felt across the school, with the history department, for example, learning French before a trip to Paris.

Governance of the school is good. The chair of governors and other governors are regularly in school and hold the school to account for the standards it achieves. Outside professionals associated with the school are very positive about the school and share the view that Polesworth is an outstanding school. One commented, 'There's a commitment here.' There is very effective collaborative working with these partners and also with the Anker Valley Partnership of local schools. Parents too are very supportive. The overwhelming number of positive questionnaires returned during the inspection demonstrates parents' admiration and appreciation of what the school is providing for their children. One parent commented, 'The school strives hard for students to say I can.' A senior student said, 'I don't want to leave the school' and a new Year 7 student said 'the school helps me to unleash the smartness inside'.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The provision for sixth form students is outstanding. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average overall: it operates a very open admissions policy and a number of students join from other schools. Students make excellent progress to achieve above average standards. Like the rest of the school, the overall quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good, with some outstanding, enabling students to become independent learners. The school provides a good range of advanced level courses for students and these are developing as the sixth form continues to grow. A clear example of the outstanding quality of the sixth form is the growing number of students who decide to continue their education when they leave school. They make this decision themselves because they have experienced such a

positive and enjoyable learning experience at Polesworth. The school has developed a good range of intermediate courses to meet the needs and interests of students. Many sixth form students take part in enrichment activities and benefit from, and speak very positively about, the excellent care, guidance and support provided by the school. Personal development and well-being are outstanding, so that students develop into mature and quietly confident people, eager to make a positive contribution to the outside world. This is encouraged through them taking on a variety of leadership roles across the school. The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding because leaders inspire and enable their students to develop to the best of their ability, which students appreciate very much.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the questioning strategies used by teachers in lessons.
- Make success criteria more measurable and more explicit in all development planning.
- Expand the range of vocational opportunities in the Key Stage 4 curriculum.

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

Personal development and well-being

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

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	1
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	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	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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

14 December 2007



Dear Students

Inspection of Polesworth Language College, Tamworth, B78 1QT

Thank you very much for your warm welcome when my colleague and I visited your school last week. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work, and watching you learn. We thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection and what would make your school even better.

- You go to an outstanding school and your parents agree.
- You obviously enjoy coming to school and are proud to say you go to Polesworth.
- You work hard and achieve impressive results, especially in English and mathematics.
- More and more of you are staying on to the sixth form.
- The teaching at the school is good or better in most classes and the relationships you build up with staff are very positive.
- All adults in the school really care for you and want you to succeed. When any of you need special help, it is always there for you.
- You grow and develop as mature young men and women because of the range of opportunities you have to take on leadership roles.
- You have lots of opportunities outside the curriculum to go on trips and visits, and to take part in many clubs and after school activities.
- We think your headteacher is a real inspiration and leads the school very well.
- You are given an impressive range of opportunities to interact with students from other countries and develop your understanding of internationalism.
- The Language College Status has improved the opportunities for language learning in your school and in the local community.
- You make an important contribution to the life of your community outside school.

In order to make your school even better we have asked your headteacher and senior staff to do the following things:

- improve the way teachers use questions in lessons
- use targets better in the school's future plans
- expand the range of vocational opportunities in the Key Stage 4 curriculum.

Yours sincerely

Clive Kempton
Her Majesty's Inspector