

# Churchdown School

Review

June 28 2016

## **School context**

Churchdown is a large 11-18 comprehensive school on the edge of Gloucester. It has nearly 1500 students on roll of which just under 200 are in the sixth form. The sixth form offers courses at Level 2 and Level 3 and is growing in size.

The presence of several grammar schools in Gloucester adversely affects the proportion of students who arrive with high prior attainment. Overall, students enter the school with average to below average starting points. Typically, there are more boys than girls on roll, although the relative proportions of each fluctuate from year to year. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and, therefore, supported by the pupil premium, is slightly below the national average, but is increasing. The number of students with a statement or EHC plan is broadly average.

Churchdown was previously designated a Specialist Visual Arts College and has retained and developed its well-established links with local schools and other community groups. The school converted to Academy status in November 2011.

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in July 2012 under the leadership of the previous headteacher; its overall effectiveness was judged to be Good. All aspects were graded Good except for Behaviour and Safety which were deemed to be Satisfactory. The school was requested to seek improvements in aspects of the quality of teaching and of behaviour management in order to improve the focus of a small minority of students on learning.

The current headteacher, Chris Belli, has been in post since September 2013. Since the previous inspection, a high proportion of new staff have joined the school, including a number in middle and senior leadership roles.

The next Ofsted inspection was scheduled to take place the day following this review.

## **Review context**

This appraisal of the work of the school and, specifically, its progress since the previous Ofsted inspection was carried out by three experienced reviewers, all of whom have a background in secondary headship and inspection. The evidence considered was as follows:

- Several learning walks to observe teaching and learning first-hand, conducted jointly by reviewers and senior staff
- Scrutiny of students' current work as seen in books, folders etc
- Analysis of the school's achievement data since the previous inspection, including the progress being made by current groups of students in KS3 and KS4 and in the sixth form
- Analysis of the school's track record re- attendance and exclusions
- The rigour of the school's safeguarding arrangements
- Observation of, and discussions with students during tutor time, at lesson changeovers and break/lunchtime
- Formal meetings with representative students in Years 7-10 and in the sixth form
- Meetings with middle and senior leaders and with representatives of the governing body, including its Chair
- Documentation provided by the school, and, in particular, the school improvement plan and summary of self-evaluation.

## **Review outcomes**

### **Achievement**

In 2013 (the year following the previous inspection), the school's KS4 examination results experienced a dip, with students typically making slower progress than had been the case

historically. Since then, there has been a significant and rapid improvement. In 2015, the school was above national averages on many attainment and progress measures, including the proportion of students gaining five A\*-C grades, including English and mathematics. Attainment in a wide range of different subjects, including English Language, design technology and additional science, is impressive with many subjects gaining 80%+ A\*-C pass rates. This represents sustained year-on-year improvement in most cases.

In 2015, the progress made by the great majority of students compares favourably with national figures and was a step-change improvement when compared with 2013 and 2014. Expected progress and better-than-expected progress in English, for example, was well-above average, apart from some of those students with high prior attainment. This improvement across most subjects reflects the school's heavy investment in improving the quality of teaching and in providing increasingly well-planned interventions for the minority of students who were not consistently on-track to achieve well.

The school is well aware that attainment and progress in mathematics is not consistently as strong as in English and, quite prudently, this remains a priority for the school. Similarly, the most able students have not achieved as well as they might over time. However, the school's records show that in 2016 there are likely to be distinct improvements in mathematics and for the most able. Consistently good achievement is also evident in Years 7-10.

The much improved achievement of those students supported by the pupil premium in 2015 is noteworthy and confirms that the school monitors performance closely and targets its additional funding well. On the whole, the gaps between the Year 11 students supported by pupil premium, both when compared with other students in school and with other students nationally, are narrowing. As is the case with all students, though, more work remains to be done to ensure achievement in mathematics improves to match that in English more rapidly.

Other groups of students also achieved especially well in 2015. Including those with low prior attainment and those supported by statements of additional need. With some minor variations, most disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve broadly in line with their peers in school.

Scrutiny of students' work in their exercise books, including in KS3, indicates that over time, students make consistently good or better progress, including in the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. This analysis also confirms that teachers and leaders have an accurate grasp of how well students are acquiring, extending and applying key skills and knowledge in a range of subjects. This provides a secure base to enable students to fulfil their potential as they progress through the school and beyond.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Teachers enjoy purposeful working relationships with students which creates a positive climate for learning. In almost all lessons seen by reviewers, students were willing to answer questions and talk productively about their learning. Teachers' expectations are routinely

high and are rigorously enforced. Students' work is generally well presented and most share a clear pride in their work and the progress that they make.

Students are quick to respond to teachers' instructions. For instance, in a Year 8 Food Technology lesson, after working in a concentrated manner on an extended task, students quickly responded when instructed to form a group around one piece of work so that the teacher could address a specific aspect of the task. Students are able to work equally well both on their own and in groups. In a Year 7 history lesson, students discussed a specific question on the background to the Magna Carta maturely, learning well from one another.

Teachers' questioning skills are generally well developed. Highly effective targeted questioning in Year 8 and Year 9 mathematics lessons contributed considerably to students' ability to extend their thinking and solve complex problems. In this instance, questions were directed to specific individuals, although there is some variation in this across classes. A minor area for development is to ensure that students are always challenged to explain their understanding or point of view when responding to a teacher's question. In a Year 10 science lesson observed, this was clearly evident and led to effective learning about enzymes, but this wasn't the case on all occasions.

Teachers typically plan well, including in English and mathematics, taking suitable account of students' prior learning. There is a clear structure to lessons with differentiated starter activities and main tasks in most, but not all, cases. Students are able to work through different levels of challenge with growing confidence and are becoming increasingly proficient in assessing how much progress they are making on different topics. In a small minority of lessons seen during the review, though, high attaining students were expected to follow the same activities as other groups rather than starting at a different point or tackling a specific issue at a deeper level, thereby limiting progress. The teaching in PSHE observed, in particular, did not provide enough challenge, especially for the most able.

Students' responses to teachers' feedback in books along with the corresponding responses from teachers are improving, but overall are variable in quality. Mathematics books seen during the review had very little feedback or comment from the teacher – some work was assessed by the student but there were other sections which were not marked. There is a more positive picture in history, where written comments are provided after specific units of work, and in design technology, where feedback is given at each stage and students are able to respond as they complete their work. Ensuring students receive high quality feedback within and across subjects is acknowledged by leaders to be an area for development.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

Students respond positively to their teachers and each other. They display consistently high levels of courtesy and respect for others. Transitions between lessons are very smooth –

behaviour observed during break-time was calm in and outside the dining room. Students talked amicably to the members of staff who are on duty. Staff also effectively model the positive attitudes that students should adopt. Students' behaviour observed during tutor time was exemplary.

Leaders have developed effective working relationships with local agencies to provide support or deal with specific issues. The introduction of the Learning Centre has had a marked impact on specific individuals. One Year 9 student, who had been frequently excluded for his persistent disruption and poor attitude, has been successfully reintegrated into the school. He spoke to a reviewer at some length about his experiences – and said that the centre had made all the difference – he now has a far more positive attitude and wants to stay at school. Leaders have also successfully raised the aspirations of more vulnerable students by working closely with their families. Parents are now more willing to approach the school and have worked with staff to address difficulties that individual students might be facing.

In recent years, improving the erratic attendance of a minority of students has been major focus for leaders. The strategies put in place by the school have effectively increased the attendance and attitude to school of some of the most disaffected/vulnerable students. For example, leaders carefully monitored the attendance of Year 11 students in their final weeks in school and made contact with potential absentees early in the morning. This intervention ensured 100% attendance throughout the examination period. Systems are now in place to support students whose attendance is a cause for concern. Consequently, attendance at 94.8% is closer to the national average and persistent absenteeism has been reduced from 11% to 6%. The school makes a point of highlighting students' regular attendance. For example, five students were observed during the review being rewarded for their attendance in the Year 8 assembly.

Staff, students and governors are unanimous in their view that behaviour has improved markedly in the recent past. Staff attribute this to the headteacher's inspirational leadership. Leaders say that the number of incidents of poor behaviour has been reduced because staff feel empowered and supported to deal with issues before they become problems. The new rewards and sanctions policy has a marked impact on attitudes. Students and staff know what is expected of them and incidents are dealt with in a calm and considered manner. A useful next step would be to develop a tracking system which assesses the impact of improvement strategies on key groups of learners. The results of this form of analysis could also be used to assess the impact and use of targeted funding. It would also be useful to measure improvements in behaviour against the school's values rather than solely statistics about reductions in misdemeanours.

### **Leadership and management**

The review addressed several key aspects:

*Self-evaluation* is comprehensive and accurate. Leaders analyse a range of performance data effectively and have constructed workable plans to secure improvement in the most important areas. They are aware that some aspects of the school improvement plan (SIP) and the summary of self-evaluation (SEF) would benefit from some further refinements.

*The leadership of teaching and learning* is a key strength and is improving. Senior leaders articulated passionately the importance of consistency in the application of the school's clear and ambitious vision. Senior and middle leaders are unequivocal that teaching and learning are their main priorities, not administrative tasks. Teachers and middle leaders are expected to take responsibility for their own classrooms and departments. Lesson observations are triangulated to ensure consistency in observation and feedback techniques.

There are frequent opportunities for professional development including weekly CPD sessions, INSET days (which are often led by the Lead Practitioners) and the Outstanding Teacher Programme. There are robust systems in place to support underachieving staff, including teaching forums and 1:1 coaching. Whilst the subject leaders spoken to were able to speak confidently about their predictions for attainment for 2016, they were less secure when analysing progress, both overall and for groups.

*Safeguarding* is very strong – robust systems are understood by all members of the school community. There is a comprehensive training programme for all staff and secure systems for reporting and monitoring incidents of abuse. The good relationships established with the wider community and social agencies ensure that support is provided in a timely manner. Many of the concerns identified relate to a small group of students. Leaders know these students and their families well and work hard to support them.

*The promotion of SMSC* is highly effective. The headteachers' Year 8 assembly observed by a reviewer conveyed a very powerful message about different forms of courage; students were challenged to think about the meaning of courage in their own and others' lives. The high quality displays of students' work throughout the school and in the entrance to the reception provide strong messages about achievement and success. The photographs of students and the inspirational quotations displayed in different parts of the school provide consistent messages about belief, integrity and compassion.

*Governors* hold the school to account effectively. They know the school well and are becoming increasingly adept at providing challenge to leaders, including with regard to how well different groups of students are achieving. They have a reasonable grasp of how the additional funds to support disadvantaged students are spent, but would benefit from acquiring a little more detail on the impact of this spending. Governors are clear about the full range of their responsibilities, including with regard to safeguarding.

## **Sixth Form**

There has been year-on year-improvements in attainment and progress as a result of raising teachers' expectations. This has led to students having greater belief in their abilities. Historically, achievement in vocational subjects has been better than in AS and A2 subjects and girls' attainment and progress has been better than boys'. This is now beginning to change with greater consistency across the study areas.

In the last two years there has been a focus on improving accountability and this has been achieved through ensuring greater rigour in both formal and informal processes, including daily learning walks by the head of sixth form, more formal lesson observations and closer analysis of progress data.

The attendance of Year 12 students is just below the rest of the school at 93.6% but Year 13 attendance remains stuck at around 90%. Leaders acknowledge that this may be as a result of the process for recording home study arrangements and they are committed to addressing this problem.

Safeguarding arrangements, including with regard to e-safety are secure and include calls home for first day absences. Students are expected to sign in and out of school. Students are well informed about British values through both lessons and assemblies and have had input from a local Iman about the dangers of radicalisation.

Good information, advice and guidance are provided by an independent adviser and this is appreciated by the students. There is an extensive enrichment programme in place to help students to make the right decisions about their futures, including HE, employment and apprenticeships. Year 12 have a "Futures Week" in July and there is effective advice and support for UCAS applications, including visits to universities. There were no NEETs in either 2015 or 2016.

### **Student views**

Students in all year groups spoken to by reviewers were very positive about their experiences at Churchdown and strikingly forthcoming in their willingness to share their views. They spoke about improvements in behaviour and attitudes to learning over the last few years, and especially since the arrival of the headteacher. They report that most of their lessons are now much more structured and only rarely are interrupted by poor behaviour. They believe that relationships are good, with teachers being approachable and willing to give freely of their time at breaks or after school to help students.

Students say the School Council is effective because it allows some students to take on positions of responsibility and they feel that leaders listen to them, for example by allowing them to use mobile phones sensibly. Other leadership opportunities in sport and as prefects were felt to be valuable. They highlighted a wide range of extra-curricular activities including STEM opportunities. Although students learn about British values, they do not all feel they have had enough information about radicalisation. They would also like to be given more information about how to manage their finances.

### **Conclusion**

Churchdown is demonstrably a school whose direction of travel is extremely positive. Leaders and governors have responded well to some concerns about aspects of the school's performance in the past and ensured that the right improvement priorities have been pursued with vigour. Progress on the areas highlighted in the last inspection report in 2012 is clearly evident.

Reviewers found that morale within the school community was extremely high and that staff and students feel that they are heading very much in the right direction. Inspectors agree with that view. This is a well-led school making sustained progress over time.

### **Main areas for improvement**

1. Narrow the gap between students' achievement in English and in mathematics, including for those students supported by the pupil premium
2. Improve the relative achievement of the most able students, ensuring that lessons consistently provide sufficient challenge
3. Ensure that the quality of marking is equally good within and across all subjects
4. Continue to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence
5. Refine tracking of aspects of improvements in behaviour
6. Refine aspects of SIP and SEF
7. Ensure all middle leaders are confident and proficient in their analysis of performance data, including for current students
8. Consider suggestions made by students.

### **Reviewers**

Ken Bush, Steve Poole and David Smith