

Bow School of Maths and Computing

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100965
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	354921
Inspection dates	9–10 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	604
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charles Teale
Headteacher	Beverly Dobson
Date of previous school inspection	31 October–1 November 2007
School address	Paton Close Fairfield Road Bow London E3 2QD
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 lessons involving 31 teachers, and meetings were held with representative governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, attended an assembly and tutorial periods, and looked at planning documents, assessment information and students' work. In addition, inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 37 parents and carers and scrutinised others from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The school's progress in improving students' attainment and providing them with the foundation for further learning, given that the overall improvement trend is lower than that found nationally.
- The impact of the provision for students who have identified special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The extent to which the school has improved teaching and how well teachers use assessment information to set work to take learning forward quickly.
- How well middle managers evaluate their areas and contribute to school improvement to ensure that there is a capacity for sustained improvement.

Information about the school

The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is high, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The majority of students are from Bangladeshi backgrounds, and a wide range of other backgrounds are represented in smaller numbers. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. The percentage of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is high, with their needs relating mainly to learning, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A higher proportion of students join or leave the school during their secondary education than is found nationally.

The school was designated with specialist status in mathematics and computing in September 2008. Plans are well advanced to relocate the school to a new site in 2014, when it will become an 11–19 co-educational school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Bow School of Maths and Computing provides its students with a satisfactory and improving education. Much has been accomplished since the last inspection and the school now has many good aspects to its performance. In particular, the headteacher has shown great determination in effectively improving leadership and management across the school during a time when it has been difficult to recruit suitably qualified and experienced middle leaders. In turn, this has secured better teaching, guidance and support which has resulted in good learning for students and accelerated their progress. Students show their enjoyment of school in their high attendance. They say that they like coming to school because others are welcoming and they have positive attitudes to learning.

Senior leaders and staff are resolute in their commitment to helping students to overcome the many barriers they face in their lives. This effectively ensures that students make consistently good gains in their learning during their time in the school, although their attainment overall remains low. Students' overall attainment has not risen in line with that found nationally, but, given the small size of the school, this is a reflection of the different abilities and needs of students in different year groups. The success of the school's emphasis on improving students' basic skills is shown in the reduced gap between school and national performance for the proportion achieving five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. The school's tracking data indicates that students in the current Year 11 are making good progress and working at higher levels, and as a result more students have already gained good grades in mathematics than previously, strongly improving attainment and reducing the gap further. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who speak English as an additional language make good progress because of the well-targeted support they receive.

Improvements in teaching are effectively leading to more even progress across the school, but there are still some inconsistencies which are being addressed through a coaching programme for teachers. For example, activities in a few lessons are not always well matched to students' knowledge and understanding so tasks are sometimes too difficult or insufficiently challenging. Students have good attitudes to their learning, but they say that in some lessons they find learning more difficult because activities lack real interest or do not enable them to be practically involved. Students generally respond well to working in groups, but a few have yet to develop their understanding of how to work independently because these skills are not emphasised consistently across the whole school. Similarly, the curriculum lacks

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sufficiently planned opportunities to develop students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology in all subjects. Teachers mark students' work regularly and give good guidance about how work could be improved, but students are not routinely required to follow up on the advice given.

Staff and the governing body know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and planning for improvement is sharply focused on areas which will bring about the greatest improvement. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and staff at all levels value their role in contributing to school improvement. New management information systems are used well to evaluate students' achievement and plan changes in provision. The range of successful developments, especially in the progress made in promoting the role of middle managers, the effective improvements in teaching and the improving attainment across the school indicate a good capacity for sustained improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help students to raise their attainment in their examinations at the end of Year 11 by increasing further the amount of good or better teaching so that in lessons:
 - the level of challenge is appropriate to take learning forward quickly from students' starting points
 - as much learning as possible is practical and interesting, to engage students more fully in their learning
 - attention is given to developing students' skills to work independently
 - students are given opportunities to follow up on the advice given in marking.
- Improve provision by implementing a whole-school approach to developing students' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills across the curriculum.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Learning takes place within a calm and productive working environment which enables students to work hard and enjoy school. Students are mostly actively engaged in their learning and develop confidence in their skills, for example when they have opportunities to discuss issues together and present their ideas to the rest of the class. In these lessons, students show their respect for, and interest in, others' views. In a few lessons where activities are not sufficiently engaging, some students find it difficult to sustain their concentration levels for a long time so their progress is only satisfactory rather than good. Similarly, when group activities are not set up clearly enough, students sometimes lack the personal skills to organise things for

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themselves. Students are reflective about their work and have a good understanding of their targets and what they need to do to reach these.

The school's data show that students are making increasingly rapid gains in their learning so progress from their starting points when they join the school is good, bringing securely rising attainment closer to the national average. The attainment profile of students joining the school in Year 7 has become more representative of the full ability range in recent years, and their good progress gives them a good foundation for Key Stage 4 work. Previously, students' attainment on entry was very low. Consequently, although students make good progress, their overall GCSE attainment remains low. Data also indicate that the longer students are in the school, the better their progress, enabling those whose education has been disrupted to make up lost ground.

Support for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are learning English as an additional language is personalised and effective so that they make good progress. The vast majority of students enter further education or training after Year 11, reflecting the school's good guidance and efforts to ensure that they progress onto suitable post-16 courses. Students have responded well to the school's drive to promote attendance, helping them to develop important qualities for the world of work, and this is further supported by appropriate work experience. Their economic and financial awareness is promoted well through a range of activities, including an enterprise morning for Year 8 observed during the inspection, organised by the local Business Enterprise Partnership. Students demonstrated their astuteness in making decisions about a range of scenarios and an ability to work effectively as a team. Given their high attendance, securely improving basic skills, positive attitudes to learning and good personal skills, students are well placed to take advantage of the future training opportunities offered to them.

Students praise the many educational, cultural and sporting opportunities which they have and participate well in them, remarking that 'we get on well, we are one family'. The ethos is one of respect for all and friendships across ethnic and religious groups are developed well through events such as Caribbean lunch days or Somali coffee mornings. They appreciate that instances of bullying or racist behaviour are extremely rare, and that when issues arise, they are dealt with swiftly by staff. Students' understanding of healthy lifestyles is shown in the popularity of school lunch and healthy snacks at break time. They understand wider issues relating to their health and safety, such as substance abuse, and value the school's support, for example to stop smoking. Students have many opportunities to improve their understanding of their own and others' cultures, for example through visits from poets and artists from different backgrounds. Students undertake their responsibilities as prefects, school councillors or reading buddies seriously. They gain greatly from their contribution to the wider community, such as in the 'Geezers Project' supporting local older citizens, hosting them for lunch and making a film comparing life in Bow 'Then and Now'.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

There are many examples of strong teaching which engages and motivates students well. In the best lessons observed during the inspection, teachers developed students' thinking and speaking skills through challenging questioning and opportunities for students to articulate their thinking before making written responses. In some lessons, opportunities are missed to develop students' basic skills, particularly in literacy and to extend vocabulary for students who speak English as an additional language by exploring technical language and key subject words in detail. In the past, good progress was achieved through additional lessons, mainly in Year 11. This is no longer necessary to the same extent, although there is a full programme of additional sessions in place as Year 11 students prepare for their final examinations. Teachers use the information from regular assessment well to target underachievement at an early stage, and now students' good progress is more consistent over a longer period of time.

Although the size of the school limits the range of options on offer in Key Stage 4, students have access to an appropriate range of academic subjects. The school is developing courses, for example in science, physical education and business, to make sure that they more closely meet students' needs and interests, particularly catering for those students who prefer a more vocational and practical option to learning. Staffing difficulties have hampered the implementation of all aspects of the school's specialist plan. However, available funding has had a positive impact on improving the infrastructure for information and communication technology across

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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the school, and attainment in mathematics is rising.

The school works with a wide range of external agencies to tailor additional support when this is needed. Students’ experiences are enriched well, both within the curriculum and through extra-curricular activities, including opportunities for residential activities. Involvement with executives from Rothschild’s Bank provides good role models and work with Bangladeshi community groups has provided support for individual students and their families, and has helped to reduce the small amount of persistent absence. Very careful attention is given to supporting the most vulnerable students to ensure that they are placed appropriately after they leave school. Links with the Bow Arts Trust, the Whitechapel Gallery and involvement in the Olympic Village broaden students’ horizons and extend their cultural development well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other leaders have a clear vision for improvement, which is combined with the skill and determination to take the school forward effectively. A clear focus on developing teachers’ practice through a well-planned training and coaching programme is successfully raising students’ attainment. The drive for further improvement remains strong, and staff morale is high. The governing body has improved its systems to ensure that governors have a good understanding of the school and hold it to account. Following a period of difficult recruitment, the school now has suitably qualified and experienced middle managers who are having a significant impact on raising attainment. They are positive about their accountability because they feel supported by their managers.

Procedures for ensuring the safeguarding of students are extremely thorough. The school site is secure and robust arrangements make sure that students are safe across the split-site. This is helped by their sensible behaviour and supportive adult supervision as they move around between buildings. The school places a high priority on promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination. This is seen in the close and regular tracking of students’ progress to ensure that any emerging differences in the performance of groups are identified quickly and action taken to target additional support. Consequently, there is very little variation in the progress made by groups of students. The commitment to inclusion is also reflected in the care taken to prevent exclusion, and shown in no recent permanent exclusions.

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Students rightly believe that the school is a cohesive community, and staff effectively instil values and behaviour in students which they take beyond the school walls. Students are involved in many projects which help them to have a good understanding about life beyond school and living in a multi-ethnic community, although they have fewer opportunities to understand different communities, such as rural and less culturally diverse areas, in Britain. The school has a wide range of partners which effectively impact on many aspects of its work. For example, staff work closely with local authority consultants to improve classroom practice and students’ experiences are enriched and their personal development strengthened through activities such as contributing to a television broadcast. The school’s specialism makes a good contribution in providing opportunities for members of the local community to develop their literacy and computer skills, in turn helping them to understand the school’s values and involvement in the local community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers responding to the questionnaire is lower than in most secondary schools. Most responses are positive about the overall work of the school. However, a few responses indicate concerns about some aspects of the school, particularly how the school takes account of parents’ and carers’ suggestions and concerns, and how the school meets particular needs. Inspectors found that the school values and acts upon the views of parents and carers when possible, and that provision for individual needs is good overall. A few comments were made about individual issues but did not form any specific trend across the questionnaire responses.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Bow School of Maths and Computing to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 37 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 604 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	8	22	23	62	5	14	1	3
The school keeps my child safe	14	38	22	59	1	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	8	22	26	70	2	5	1	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	10	27	24	65	3	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	8	22	23	62	4	11	1	3
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	11	30	20	54	6	16	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	22	24	65	5	14	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	9	24	25	68	2	5	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	12	32	18	49	7	19	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	27	21	57	4	11	1	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	4	11	27	73	4	11	2	5
The school is led and managed effectively	8	22	25	68	3	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	12	32	22	59	3	5	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Bow School of Maths and Computing, London E3 2QD

I am writing to let you know the outcome of the recent inspection. Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team and particularly to those who gave up part of your lunch time to share your views about the school. We found that yours is a satisfactory school, although we also saw improvements in many areas such as teaching and the progress you make. Your attendance is excellent.

Most of you make good progress and your attainment is rising. You say that behaviour has improved recently and the good attitudes of the vast majority of you make an important contribution to good learning in lessons. You are considerate of one another around the school. Staff care for you well and give good support, particularly when individuals have particular difficulties. The school works well with a range of partners to improve the quality of education, for example for Year 10 students on work experience. We saw how much Year 8 students gained from the Enterprise Morning. The school is well led and staff are committed to making the school better. However, there are some things that could be better and we have asked staff to help you to raise your attainment further by making sure that in lessons:

- the level of challenge is appropriate to take learning forward quickly
- as many activities as possible are practical and interesting for you
- you have more opportunities to develop your skills of independent learning so that you do more for yourselves
- you are expected to follow up the advice given in marking
- you have opportunities to develop your literacy, numeracy and computer skills in more subjects.

You can help by making sure that you fully engage in all lessons.

Best wishes in your studies.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings
Lead inspector

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