

Church Stretton School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	123565
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	380689
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2012
Lead inspector	James McNeillie HMI

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	682
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Trudie Blackburn
Headteacher	Steve Lunt
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2006
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

James McNeillie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janet Bird

Additional inspector

Michael Phipps

Additional inspector

Clare Saunders

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspection team observed 28 lessons taught by 25 teachers, as well as visiting a number of lessons for shorter periods of time. Meetings were held with staff, students and the Chair of the Governing Body. The lead inspector also spoke to parents and carers who were in school as part of a planned celebration event. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at documentation related to self-evaluation, school improvement planning and students' current levels of achievement. The views expressed by 128 parents and carers, a sample of students and some staff in response to Ofsted's questionnaires were also considered.

Information about the school

This school is smaller in size than the average secondary school and serves the market town of Church Stretton and surrounding towns and villages. Most students are from a White British heritage and there are few for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average, although increasing. The overall proportions of disabled students and of those with special educational needs are slightly below average, although increasing. A slightly higher than average proportion of students is supported with a statement of special educational needs. These students have a range of specific and moderate learning difficulties, with some having physical disabilities. The school exceeds current national floor standards, which set the minimum standards expected for attainment and progress.

In addition to its designation as a specialist technology college, the school holds a range of awards, including those for Healthy Schools and Eco-School. The school site is used by the local community for adult education and cultural events.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. Students achieve well to leave with attainment in subjects across the curriculum that is significantly above the national average. Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress also from their starting points. This good achievement is a result of the quality of teaching they receive, the school’s varied curriculum, tailored to learners’ needs, and quick and effective intervention by school leaders and teachers when there are signs of underachievement. Students’ achievement is not yet outstanding because, over time, all groups of students are not making rapid and sustained progress.
- Teaching has a good impact on the progress students make. This is because teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons that engage and motivate students. Teachers have a good understanding of how to support different learning styles and use this knowledge well, in particular to support disabled students and those with special educational needs. Opportunities to challenge fully the learning of the most-able students are missed sometimes. Students receive quick and precise feedback in many lessons and, while this is supported sometimes by written marking, practice is not consistent.
- Positive relationships exist between students and with their teachers. The atmosphere of mutual respect is effective in supporting students’ strong social and moral development and is a strength of the school. Students of different levels of ability, backgrounds and needs feel safe and valued. Not surprisingly, this results in good behaviour for learning and respectful conduct around the site.
- Strong and effective leaders have an accurate view of the school’s strengths and have sharply focused plans to tackle the school’s relative weaknesses. Successful and high-quality opportunities for professional development have enabled teaching to improve. Leaders engage well with parents and carers, who are supportive of the school’s work.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement for all groups of students to outstanding by ensuring that teaching is more consistently outstanding to enable all groups of students to make rapid and sustained progress.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan lessons consistently that fully challenge all students, particularly the most able
 - teachers use a full range of questioning strategies in lessons to extend students' thinking and understanding
 - teachers' marking is consistently regular, involves students and always gives them specific points for improvement
 - existing opportunities to share excellent practice are extended, including in supporting students to apply skills across the curriculum.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students from all social backgrounds and ethnic heritage make good progress. They join the school with above-average levels of attainment and leave with attainment that is consistently significantly above the national average overall, as shown for example in the proportion achieving five GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, at grades A* to C. Students make at least good progress in subjects across the curriculum and in some, such as in mathematics, they make outstanding progress. The school's rigorous and accurate progress-tracking systems, as well as evidence from observation of learning, confirm that all groups of students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, are also currently achieving well. Parents, carers and students are positive about the progress made. Achievement is not yet consistently outstanding because teaching does not always challenge every learner fully to enable them to make rapid and sustained progress over time.

The quality of students' learning is good because they engage well in activities, have positive attitudes and feel confident to take risks in positive learning environments. For example, in a Year 10 construction lesson, students developed each other's learning by taking on the role of the instructor. In an English lesson for all abilities, students used their own knowledge of which skills they needed to improve, such as using a wide range of punctuation accurately or being able to develop a character in narrative writing. They did so well by working together at various 'stations' in the classroom. Disabled students and those with special educational needs learn well also across the curriculum. This results from teachers' and other adults'

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understanding of how to support learning and provide high-quality, personalised interventions in lessons.

Students have well-developed skills. They apply good oral communication skills in all subjects. Individuals with statements of special educational needs were able to apply mathematical skills well in geography and information and communication technology skills in humanities. When students are less successful in applying their skills, it is often because they do not take the initiative to do so. For example, students have the knowledge of how to present information for a specific audience and purpose using information technology, but were less successful when not explicitly directed to do so.

Quality of teaching

Teachers build positive relationships which enhance students' moral and social development. Their good subject knowledge engages and motivates students. Most lessons involve students actively in their learning and the students describe this as one of the most important aspects of teaching they enjoy. The best teaching helps students to make rapid progress over time because learning takes place at a good pace, activities are matched well to the range of students' abilities, and regular feedback gives clear and specific ways to improve. In one outstanding Key Stage 3 mathematics lesson, students took responsibility readily for their learning and the teacher used carefully selected questions to support and challenge their understanding and development of skills. An outstanding Year 9 religious education lesson enabled students to reflect with sensitivity on their own values and beliefs in relation to the suffering of other human beings. This is one striking example of how teaching, the curriculum and the very positive and safe learning environment – to which the students themselves contribute – ensure the students' strong spiritual and moral development.

When teaching is no better than satisfactory, students, especially the most able, are not challenged fully in the activities planned or the questions asked of them. In these situations, teachers' high expectations of behaviour are not matched with equally high expectations of progress. Students receive some excellent written feedback, which is regular and gives them specific areas for improvement. These good examples are, however, inconsistent across subjects and year groups. Opportunities for students to apply skills in different subjects are implicit in many lessons, but not all teachers are explicit about this in their planning and practice. Excellent practice in this area is not shared enough across the school. Parents and carers agree that the teaching their children receive is of a good quality, with some that is outstanding, but also comment that challenge for the most able could be increased. Inspectors endorse all these views.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students feel safe in school, enjoy coming to school – as shown in their above-average levels of attendance. They are supported well by the curriculum in

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understanding how to be safe and healthy. They are positive about their learning environment and feel confident to voice their opinions and thoughts without fear of being laughed at or dismissed. Students understand what constitutes different forms of bullying and say that there are few examples of it occurring. Also, they feel confident that adults and other students will help and take decisive action, if any bullying does occur. Senior students act as mentors, easily identified by their red polo shirts, and inspectors were told of examples when they were invaluable in supporting others. Disabled students and those with special educational needs feel valued and welcomed also, including those students with physical disabilities who recently joined the school. This is a testament to the ethos of the school and the student body's good social and moral development.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school site is good. Students respect each other and their environment, showing this for example by behaving sensibly in the school's new restaurant and moving calmly between lessons. Learning can take place at a good rate because there are few incidences of disruption in lessons. This is confirmed not only by the first-hand observation during the inspection, but also in the school's behaviour records. Fixed-term exclusion figures are reducing year on year, as is the number of students who are excluded more than once. Students understand what behaviour is expected of them, say that these expectations are largely consistent and are positive about how the school rewards and celebrates their achievement. During the inspection, the excellent monthly 'Head's Afternoon Tea' took place, which celebrates individual students' academic, personal and social achievement. Students appreciate being nominated for these awards and parents and carers who attended the event commented how much they valued the opportunity to be part of this public acknowledgement of their children's success. Students are positive about behaviour in school, described the inspection days as 'typical' and are irritated with their peers on the rare occasions when any low-level disruption occurs. Parents and carers, largely, agree, with some commenting on the very positive ethos of the school.

Leadership and management

A precise vision for improvement is articulated by the headteacher and other senior leaders. Thorough and searching evaluation of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses is regular and leaders use their findings to ensure that improvements are made. For example, improvements are evident in recent and longer-term advances in the quality of teaching, in greater consistency of leadership at all levels, and in students' good achievement. High-quality professional development opportunities related to teaching are linked to the needs of individuals and groups of teachers through the performance management process. The school's focused in-house training opportunities, the 'PD30s', started this academic year as a result of a careful analysis of teaching and have already led to better practice in the classroom. Leadership-development opportunities, including through university qualifications and work with other educational institutions, have led to leaders' increased effectiveness in their roles. All this effective practice supports the school's strong capacity for improvement.

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Disabled students and those with special educational needs flourish because of strong leadership in this area and the school's commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities. Leaders have a clear understanding of the progress made by all groups of students, particularly in Key Stage 4, as a result of good tracking procedures across subject areas. The school is making increased rates of progress for all students a key part of its 3-year improvement cycle, for example with the appointment of a gifted and talented leader. Inspection findings endorse this and agree it is one of the priorities for the school in moving to being outstanding. The 'raising achievement team', which comprises senior and middle leaders, and the school's special educational needs coordinator ensure that individual students, or groups sharing similar weaknesses, receive timely and effective support when underachievement is identified. Other aspects, such as attendance and participation in events that contribute to students' achievement, including that of students whose circumstances have made them potentially vulnerable and may, consequently, underachieve, are also monitored regularly.

The school's curriculum matches the needs of students well, offering largely GCSE courses, but also high-quality applied and vocational qualifications. A recent review has taken place which led to the introduction of new courses, including Spanish, business studies, and media studies. Key Stage 4 students enjoy these courses, which add further to the school's good and sometimes outstanding promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, Year 10 students were challenged to consider how gender stereotypes are endemic in different forms of media. Opportunities to develop greater cultural awareness are given to Year 7 students in the 'Thinking through Humanities' course, as well as in enrichment activities such as trips to Jordan and the good links the school has with countries in Europe and Asia. Enrichment activities, such as Year 11 students working with local community groups, support the students' strong personal development also.

The governing body has a good knowledge of the school's work and is able to hold leaders to account in a meaningful way because of its regular involvement in the school's review and evaluation processes. Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements, training for all staff is of a good quality and approaches to keeping safe the most potentially vulnerable students are similarly effective.

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	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



26 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Church Stretton School, Church Stretton, SY6 6EX

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to my colleagues and me when we inspected your school. This is a good school and you, the students, play a significant part in this. All of you achieve well because teaching is good. You told us that you think Mr Lunt and his colleagues are doing a good job and we agree with you. You told us also that you feel safe in school, there are always adults or other students available to help if there are problems, and that you all respect each other and behave well in lessons and around the site. We agree with you on these features. Your attendance is above the national average – so, well done.

For it to move from being good to outstanding, we have given your school some priorities for improvement. One is to make sure that all of you make even more rapid and sustained progress during your time at school. The excellent teaching that exists is already being shared with all teachers. We have suggested that this expands and helps you to use your well-developed English, mathematics and information communication technology skills more actively in all subjects. In addition, it is important that teachers plan learning activities and use questioning strategies which challenge all of you – particularly those of you who can learn quickly. Teachers' written comments on your work help you know the next steps to improve and we have asked that you get this feedback regularly in all subjects.

You can help by letting your teachers know if you are finding work too easy and by continuing to respond well to the high expectations they have of you in the classroom. Another way is for you to make sure that you take time to read your teachers' written comments and then act on that advice.

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie
Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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