

Sir Graham Balfour High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124444
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380898
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2012
Lead inspector	David Driscoll

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	985
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	125
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Norman Cobon
Headteacher	David Wright
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Driscoll	Additional inspector
Janet Harvey	Additional inspector
Keith Brown	Additional inspector
Pamela Hemphill	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed the teaching in 35 lessons, as well as visiting further lessons and activities for shorter periods to evaluate pupils' behaviour and safety. A total of 35 teachers were observed teaching. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. They took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school's records of pupils' progress, safeguarding documentation, behaviour records and results of the school's checks on the quality of teaching. The inspection team analysed the responses of the 134 parents and carers to the inspection questionnaire.

Information about the school

Sir Graham Balfour High School is of similar size to the average secondary school. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with disabilities and those who have special educational needs supported by the school is average. The proportion additionally supported by external professionals or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. Around 94% of pupils come from a White British background. The rest of the school population is made up of very small numbers of students from a wide range of different minority ethnic groups. The school meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. The school was accredited with Staffordshire Anti-Bullying Pledge Plus in 2011 for its continued work on tackling bullying.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school that provides a sound education for its students.
- The sixth form is satisfactory.
- The school's leaders have established a strong ethos that promotes good moral values, and good behaviour and safety. Discipline is good and applied consistently by staff.
- Attainment is average and achievement satisfactory in both the main school and the sixth form, reflecting the quality of teaching.
- Although teaching is satisfactory overall, there is wide variation in quality across the school.
- Students have many opportunities to work in the local community and in small groups, which promotes their good social development.
- The encouragement that students receive to discuss topics improves their vocabulary to a good degree.
- Changes to the curriculum are now ensuring that it meets the needs of all groups of students.
- There are outstanding systems in place to track students' progress and review the work within subjects.
- Monitoring of teaching is not so strong as that of students' progress and means that self-evaluation is satisfactory rather than good.
- The school's leaders were initially slow to respond to a dip in results, but have demonstrated their satisfactory capacity to improve the school and achievement is now improving again.

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?

- Improve the quality of teaching and secure consistently good progress by ensuring:
 - marking accurately identifies errors, insists that corrections are carried out, sets clear targets for improvement and checks that students are working towards their targets
 - all teachers engage students more actively in their learning
 - lesson plans make clear what is expected of students of differing abilities.

- Improve the accuracy of the school's self-evaluation and monitoring of teaching by:
 - ensuring greater consistency in the use of criteria when judging the quality of teaching
 - focusing on the impact of teaching on the quality of learning for students
 - making better use of the evidence available in students' books and other work to evaluate their progress over time.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Almost all parents and carers responding to the questionnaire were pleased with their children's achievement. Inspectors found achievement to be satisfactory. Students join and leave the school with attainment that is broadly average as a result of making satisfactory progress. Progress is satisfactory in the sixth form, and attainment is average.

Students' learning is satisfactory in lessons, both in the main school and the sixth form. They concentrate well on their tasks and pay close attention to their teachers. Learning is good when students are actively involved in the lesson, but their progress is slower when they have to sit and listen for extended periods or just copy work. Students of all abilities particularly enjoy competitive activities. Lower attaining Year 9 students, for example, threw themselves into activities where they had to 'beat the teacher' in French. Similarly, A-level students raced to get to the correct answer before another group in chemistry. There are no significant differences in progress between different subjects in the main school, but there are variations between classes that are a result of some being taught better than others. Progress at AS level is improving and is now good, especially in information technology and history. Students make good progress in developing new vocabulary through the many opportunities they have to discuss topics. Progress in writing and mathematics is satisfactory rather than good as these skills are not reinforced as well through marking.

Achievement in the past was less strong for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, those with disabilities and those with special educational needs. However, changes to the curriculum and the way that students' progress is tracked have ensured that the gaps in performance between these groups and their peers have now closed. Disabled students and those with special educational needs now make the same satisfactory progress as others.

Quality of teaching

Almost all parents and carers responding to the questionnaire felt their children were taught well. Inspectors found that teaching is satisfactory; it has some strengths but these are not consistent across the school. Students agree that teachers have some good ideas for lessons that enthuse and engage them, such as working out which film is being described to help develop comprehension skills in a foreign language. Information and communication technology is often used well to motivate students. However, such practice is not consistent across the school and in other lessons students spend too long simply listening to the teacher, including in the sixth form.

In these circumstances students maintain their concentration, but do not learn as much. Teachers always make very clear what it is that students are to be learning, and check that students have made progress by the end of the lesson. This often involves the students in assessing their own work or that of their peers, which they take seriously and enjoy doing. They know that they are trusted by their teachers to do this honestly, which helps develop their good moral values. Other forms of assessment are not as strong, especially marking. There is considerable variation in the quality of marking between teachers. Often it consists just of ticks and correction of errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Misconceptions and errors in content are not consistently picked up. When errors are identified, they are not always followed up to ensure that students learn from their mistakes. Some subjects make good use of targets, but in others this is not the case and students say they are not always clear about how well they are doing or how to improve their work.

Teachers in the classroom generally have good expectations of what students can achieve. However, these expectations are not always evident in the written curriculum planning, where the work is not always set out to match the differing capabilities and needs in the class. Teachers' good subject knowledge allows them to talk around their subjects, such as the derivation of the term 'in the limelight' in science or the historical context of Macbeth in English. This adds to students' cultural understanding, while the many opportunities to work in groups are particularly successful in promoting social skills.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The very large majority of parents and carers say that behaviour is good and that their children feel safe; inspectors agree with their views. Students agree that they feel secure, and that there is little disruption to lessons though poor behaviour. The school's consistent approach to the management of behaviour is a strength of its provision. The ethos of the school is such that there is an expectation that students will behave in a responsible manner. Students' behaviour improves markedly as they move through the school and increasingly respond to the school's high expectations. By the time they leave school, students are responsible members of society. They are polite and respectful towards adults and their peers. In lessons they respond quickly to instructions and are confident and articulate when responding to questions. The numbers of students excluded is below the national average and continues to fall each year. The school has a 'withdrawal room' where students who are poorly behaved in a lesson can be sent, but this is rarely necessary and its use is falling each year. Attendance is above average and students are punctual to school and lessons.

A small number of parents and carers, and students have concerns about bullying, especially name calling and the use of social networking to leave unkind comments. All of these relate to students in Years 7, 8 or 9. The school's records and interviews with students confirm that such incidents are taken very seriously. They are dealt with promptly and effectively, so that it is rare for a bully to reoffend. Nevertheless, where there are repeated examples the school takes strong action against the offender as well as providing good support for the victim.

Leadership and management

The school's results have dipped since it was last inspected, as lower attainers were

not making as much progress as others. The school's leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, were initially slow to react to this downturn but two years ago changed the curriculum to provide more appropriate courses for lower attaining students. The results are now being seen in the improved achievement of students currently in Year 11, while further changes in 2011 are providing an additional boost to the achievement of students currently in Year 10. The curriculum is now satisfactory. It meets the needs of different groups of students and satisfactorily promotes equality and tackles discrimination. There are many links with the local and wider community. These play an important part in the school's good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They provide students with many opportunities to work with others and help those less fortunate than themselves. Changes to the curriculum in Year 7 have provided extra support for those with weak reading and writing. This is proving very effective in improving the achievement of lower attainers. The success of the changes to the curriculum demonstrates the school's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Other changes implemented two years ago have also had a big impact on the school's capacity to improve. Its systems for tracking students' progress are now outstanding. They are highly detailed and allow underachievement to be identified and tackled at a very early stage. There is an excellent system for reviewing the work of subjects that fully involves members of the governing body. However, the weak link in the school's self-evaluation is the routine monitoring of teaching. This varies in quality depending on who is doing the observation. The focus is sometimes on what the teacher does, rather than its effectiveness in helping students to learn, and the work in students' books is often overlooked. The monitoring of a separate group of staff, who volunteer for extra observations, is much more effective because it always makes clear the areas that could be improved and so provision for professional development can be accurately targeted at where it can do the most good.

Staff morale is high because staff feel well supported by leaders and managers at all levels. Targets are challenging, but not always met or made explicit in the school development plan. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

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.



1 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Sir Graham Balfour High School, Stafford, ST16 1NR

Thank you for your help when we visited your school. We found you to be polite, respectful and well-behaved. Your parents, carers and teachers can be rightly proud of you. The staff expect you to behave well and have strong standards of discipline. This underpins much of the life of the school and you become responsible citizens as a result. The things you told us and the sensible way you provided your opinions were very helpful in allowing us to come to an accurate view of the school.

We found that you are getting a satisfactory education. You make steady progress as you move up the school and leave Y11 or the sixth form with average levels of attainment. Some of your lessons are taught outstandingly well and you clearly enjoyed these very much. However, there is much variation in the quality of teaching and other lessons do not help you to learn as well. We have asked your teachers to make sure that you are always actively engaged in your learning and that the work you are given is accurately matched to your ability. Some of you felt that you did not know how to improve your work. We agree. Some of your books are not marked well enough; mistakes are not spotted and you are not always told how to improve. We have asked your teachers to mark your work more accurately and to make sure you know the next steps that you need to take in order to succeed. You can help by asking when you are not sure how you could have done better.

The school has made satisfactory progress since it was last inspected. There has been a dip in examination results, but this has been addressed by providing a better range of courses. Your progress is tracked exceptionally well, but checks on teaching are not as good. We have asked the headteacher and other leaders to ensure that such checks are more consistent in their quality and that they take greater account of how much progress you make.

With all best wishes for your future.

Yours sincerely

David Driscoll
Lead inspector

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