

Leek High Specialist Technology School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124406
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380886
Inspection dates	15–16 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Ahson Mohammed

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	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	425
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen Murfin
Headteacher	John Spencer
Date of previous school inspection	21 January 2009
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Age group	13-19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 22 lessons and 20 teachers. They looked at a variety of documentation including development plans, school improvement partner notes, safeguarding documents and the school's evaluation of its effectiveness. Meetings were held with senior leaders, groups of students, a representative of the governing body and staff. Responses to questionnaires from 91 parents and carers, 35 members of staff and 100 students also provided evidence.

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

- Is attainment rising strongly enough, especially in English and mathematics, and are students' learning and progress improving securely because of the quality of teaching?
- How effective is the quality of leadership and management in tackling underperformance and sustaining improvement over time?
- Is teaching sufficiently challenging and supportive to meet the needs of all students?
- What has been the impact of gaining technology college status?

Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. Almost all of the students are of White British heritage and very few are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students recorded as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school has been a specialist technology college since 2004 and was re-designated in 2009. More recently the school has been granted Healthy Schools, Eco School and Dyslexia Friendly status.

The school shares the site and some facilities with The Meadows Special 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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. The school's inclusive ethos ensures that all students are able to play their part in the caring and supportive environment, enabling them to feel safe and achieve well. Rising achievement in English and mathematics has enhanced the school's work in promoting aspiration and securing improvement. This improvement is reinforced by the re-designation of the technology specialism and seen in its positive impact across the curriculum and the support to partner schools and community groups.

Students enjoy school life and behaviour is good. Attainment is average, but this reflects a rapidly improving picture from relatively low starting points. The leadership of the headteacher and the restructuring of the leadership team have resulted in good improvement in students' progress and achievement over the last academic year. This reflects the school's good capacity for sustained improvement. The schools self-evaluation is thorough and highlights key priorities for further development and for embedding the improving trend.

A particular strength of the school is the good quality of care, guidance and support. Students, parents and carers are aware and supportive of the effort the school makes on their behalf; this is evident in the overwhelming feeling of being safe. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their social skills are particularly strong, as is their understanding of what is right and wrong. Theatre trips and talks about historical events, such as the Holocaust aid their development. Students' understanding of Britain as a diverse society is also improving.

Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of further development. The school is developing its monitoring and evaluation systems across curriculum areas. This is to ensure that staff at all levels monitor and use assessment information rigorously to further develop teaching and learning. In English and mathematics improvements in teaching and learning are being driven by effective monitoring and feedback, but in some other subjects the effective use of assessment information has not been embedded for so long. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, supported by effective tracking, particularly in mathematics. Any underperformance is identified by half-termly assessments. However, the precision and rigour of assessment is inconsistent between subjects, alongside which is a little remaining inconsistency in the quality of teaching. Identification of special educational needs and/or disability triggers additional support to ensure these students achieve as well as their peers. Multi-agency based provision is effective in providing specific support for these students with special educational

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needs or other identified groups, such as those learning English as an additional language.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and use effective classroom management skills to create a positive learning environment. This is improving classroom practice which is complemented by the use of new technologies to support learning, reflecting the impact of the specialist status across the school. A few lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for students and the quality of verbal and written feedback helping students identify how to improve their work is inconsistent.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate students' progress and raise achievement by:
 - increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching across the school by spreading the good practice that already exists in the school
 - providing students with oral and written feedback which routinely identifies how they should improve their work.
- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation by subject leaders through:
 - extending the good practice that exists in subjects such as English and mathematics to all subject areas.
 - analysing with precision the progress of identified groups of students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment on entry to the school is below average. Current tracking data shows students are making good progress, including those with special educational needs. The determination to make improvement through enhancing leadership and teaching is already making a difference. The proportion of students who gain five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics has been rising over recent years. Challenging targets have been set for 2012 and senior leaders are confident that they will be met in the light of students' current progress. The results of current students who have taken their examinations in Year 10 rather than Year 11 support this.

Observations of teaching and learning during the inspection confirm that attainment is rising. Where particular groups of students are underachieving, leaders have taken action to ensure that it is reversed successfully by targeted in-class support from higher level teaching assistants. This invariably results in improved progress. The achievement of students known to be eligible for free school meals is similar to that of most other students. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported by staff and they are given carefully selected support which is targeted at their specific needs. As a result, these students also make good progress.

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In the lessons observed, there were good relationships between students and teachers. In a year 10 lesson, students were observed using a card game, this motivated students to be engaged and enjoy their learning. At the end of the lesson students were able to share their understanding of prime numbers and strategies to identify them to the teacher and their peers. Typically, students arrive at lessons prepared to work. They listen attentively to teachers and when other students are giving their responses. In the majority of lessons seen across the school, students' progress was good.

Students' attitudes to learning are generally positive. They enjoy lessons; work well with each other or independently, for example when using computers, which reflects the school's success in the work of its specialism. The school's data shows a clearly improving trend of attainment in all subjects. Current data and early entry results shows the rise is continuing. However, there is still some underperformance in certain subjects. Work is already underway to address these concerns.

The vast majority of students feel safe in school and confirmed that if they do raise concerns they are quickly and effectively addressed. 'Room21' is a self-referral provision which provides outstanding multi-agency support to deal with concerns raised by students and parents. The promotion of e-safety, health education and other subject specific curriculum programmes encourage students to work safely. The students integrate well with others from the special school that shares the facilities. Through the partnership under the specialist status students from both schools learn together in vocational courses. Students willingly take responsibility, for example through the prefect system. This is an indication of the good contribution that the students make to the school and wider community. The majority of students show commitment to adopting healthy lifestyles through participation in physical exercise in lessons as well as through the range of extra-curricular activities. Attendance has improved strongly and is now broadly average. Students acquire literacy, numeracy and computer technology skills that will be of value in the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	1
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

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 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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Students make good progress through a combination of good and sometimes outstanding teaching. This is underpinned by a good curriculum with a variety of additional activities and good care, guidance and support. There are consistent strengths in teaching. For example, relationships between staff and students are excellent and students show great respect towards staff, showing keenness to achieve their potential in lessons. In the best lessons, the pace is brisk and there are a variety of activities, many of which encourage students to learn for themselves. Excellent, well focused, questioning extends students' learning. However, on occasions when lessons are less effective, teachers do not ensure students make the best possible use of opportunities to learn for themselves. Similarly, marking in some subjects helps students to accelerate their progress because it tells them what they have achieved and how to move further forward. However, there is some variability in its quality and depth.

The curriculum matches the needs, interests and aspirations of students closely and is making a notable impact on their attainment and well-being. There is some innovative practice. For example, four languages are offered in year 9 leading to higher than national average take-up in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4. The use of new technologies to aid curriculum delivery is supported effectively by the specialism subjects. This includes the curriculum for students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities through joint provision of foundation learning accreditation with the co-located special school. This has developed significantly and provides a structured programme to help them realise their potential. Good extra-curricular and enhancement activities, such as indoor climbing provided by an adventure centre, are wide ranging and popular, adding to students' enjoyment of learning and promoting their personal, spiritual and cultural development well.

A real strength of the school is its excellent pastoral care. The very caring ethos of working with the students and their families permeates all elements of the school's work. The school has systems for identifying those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and then puts in place appropriate support; for example, improving their attendance, by using family support workers. Students say they are informed well when they make future choices or as they prepare to leave school. This is highlighted because every student has gone onto employment, training or further education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leaders have a detailed improvement plan which identifies key priorities. Their vision and ambition for the school is well understood by staff. The headteacher, supported by managers at all levels, has a clear determination to ensure the school carries on improving and has put in place a systematic monitoring process which reviews aspects such as lesson observations and fortnightly intervention through line management meetings. These ensure the school's work, particularly learning, is evaluated and action taken when needed. The application of these processes is less consistent in some areas, but effective management is starting to pick this up.

Governance is good. The governing body is very supportive of the school and have defined and effective structures in place. It challenges the school by monitoring the work of the subject areas to which members are attached and evaluate the impact of policies. It has been rigorous in ensuring that safeguarding procedures have been fully implemented evidenced by the vast majority of students reporting that they feel safe. Parent and carer views are sought at achievement evenings and via the effective online home-contact portal. The governing body understands the statutory duties of equalities and community cohesion. Within the school; the areas of race, religion and gender are satisfactorily addressed and monitored. International trips take place but further work has been identified in order for students to experience more about Britain as a diverse society. The school gives good value for money because outcomes are good.

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	3
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Leaders have worked hard to improve the effectiveness of the sixth form which is now good. Effective advice, guidance and transition arrangements ensure that students are admitted to the right level of course, taking account of their prior learning. Students make good progress in English, mathematics and information and communications technology, but slower in some other subjects. This variation occurs because the good processes and procedures relating to subject analysis and student tracking are not always applied. Attainment is broadly average. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good overall. Many lessons are engaging, well planned and resourced. The curriculum is good and meets the needs of students well through a wide range of courses. It is enhanced by links with local partnerships providing breadth to the curriculum offer.

Very few students leave during the year reflecting the school's desire to ensure that students have every chance to succeed. Students speak appreciatively about the support and guidance they receive and the majority progress to either higher education, employment or training.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form has developed clear, consistent, systems to monitor and track students' progress. This has enabled more effective intervention strategies, such as a rolling programme of one to one support from the teacher at lunchtimes to work through individual examination questions to address any potential underachievement. Students' response to sixth form life has been positive and they have enthusiastically taken up wider responsibility in school and the community, for example the running of the prefect system. They consistently adhere to safety procedures and model good behaviour.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Responses from parents and carers are extremely positive, with the vast majority saying that their child enjoys school, indicating the good links between school and

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home. Good support for students is identified as a strength and one parent/carer commented: 'Always informed of concerns. When my child wanted to drop subjects to concentrate on others teachers listened and facilitated this.' Another commented 'All the teachers care about every individual student. I feel on the whole my child's education genuinely matters to those who teach her. Even so, a few parents and carers said that the school does not always help them sufficiently to support their child's learning.

Inspectors found that comments about bad behaviour made by a small minority of parents and carers are not borne out. One parent commented about her child, '...No one has teased or bullied him and he is really well supported. He is gaining in confidence all the time and the feedback I receive is fantastic.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Leek High Specialist Technology School 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 91 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 425 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	36	40	50	55	3	3	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	38	42	51	56	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	37	41	50	55	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	41	48	53	3	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	32	35	57	63	2	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	28	31	54	59	6	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	2	66	73	3	3	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)	32	35	49	54	2	2	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	32	35	52	57	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	31	56	62	4	4	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	27	51	56	3	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	39	43	47	52	3	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	44	48	53	2	2	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 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.



17 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Leek High Specialist Technology School, Leek, ST13 6EU

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to me and the team of inspectors who visited your school. We enjoyed our discussions with those of you we spoke to in lessons, in meetings and around the school. Your views were very helpful and confirmed our findings.

We found that your school is a good and improving school. Attainment is rising; you are making good progress in your lessons. Your school is making considerable efforts so that you can make good progress in all your learning. You are well supported by staff who care for your well-being. You show a positive approach to your work and attendance has improved. You clearly enjoy the range of learning opportunities offered to you within and outside of the school day and many of you take advantage of these.

The leadership team of your school is determined to provide the best for every one of you. To help improve your school further, we have asked your headteacher, the governors and the staff to raise your achievement in all subjects by:

- making sure that you experience good teaching consistently across all areas
- monitoring the impact of the additional support provided for you

You can help by ensuring that you do not settle for anything other than your best and you follow up comments and suggestions that your teachers make to help you to improve your work. I wish you all success in the future, hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Leek High.

Yours sincerely

Ahson Mohammed
Lead inspector

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