

Big Wood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122844
Local Authority	City Of Nottingham
Inspection number	359313
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Gwen Coates HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	759
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Harris
Headteacher	Bernadette Groves
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed parts of 34 lessons and saw a similar number of teachers. They held meetings with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and staff. They observed the school's work, and scrutinised a range of documentation including the school improvement plan, self-evaluation documents and external evaluation reports. The team analysed 232 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The rate of progress students were making in lessons to determine whether teaching was sufficiently challenging and focused on its impact on learning.
- The extent to which the curriculum offered at both Key Stages 3 and 4 was contributing to raising attainment and improving the rate at which all students made progress in their learning.
- How well the school integrated pastoral and academic support in order to raise achievement.
- The extent to which middle leaders were being accountable for the quality of teaching and assessment and of achievement in their areas of responsibility.
- The extent to which senior leaders were bringing about improvements in the quality of provision at a sufficient pace to secure good student achievement.

Information about the school

Big Wood School is a smaller-than-average secondary school that is consistently oversubscribed. Most of its students come from the local housing estate. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The percentage of students from minority ethnic groups is broadly average, with White and Black Caribbean and Black and Black British Caribbean being the largest of these groups. The percentage of students who speak English as an additional language is below the national average. While the percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average, the number with a statement of special educational needs is very small.

The school has business and enterprise specialist status. It has been awarded Investors in People, Career Mark and Healthy Schools status.

In September 2010 it moved to a new school building on its existing site.

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

Big Wood School is a satisfactory school. It has many good features, including a good curriculum that meets the needs of all students. Care, guidance and support are strong and ensure all students are very well looked after both academically and pastorally. As a result, students feel exceptionally safe in this warm and welcoming school. For many students, the school is a haven. The new building provides a wonderfully spacious and light school - students are clearly proud of it and view it as a place where they can enjoy their surroundings and their learning.

Attainment is low but rising because the progress students are making in their learning, although still satisfactory, is improving securely. Nevertheless, the school recognises that attainment in English and mathematics is too low and that too few students are making expected progress in these subjects. The improving trend in both attainment and progress is a result of the robust system of monitoring and intervention in relation to students' progress and the improving quality of teaching and assessment. Although teaching and assessment is satisfactory, it is improving strongly and, where it is good, it is contributing to the improving progress students are making in their learning. At present the quality of teaching and assessment is inconsistent, in particular in matching learning activities to the varying abilities of students in lessons, in stretching and extending students' thinking, in taking action during a lesson to improve learning and in the quality of marking so that students know how to improve.

Capacity to improve is good. The headteacher is a relentless driving force in the school's journey of improvement. Together with senior and middle leaders she is embedding ambition among staff, students and their parents so that the aspirations of students are raised. For the first time in many years, the school has stable staffing and a full complement of qualified specialist teachers in the core subjects. It has smoothly and successfully completed the move to the new school building, assimilated students from a closing school and sustained the rising trend in achievement and improved other outcomes and provision. The actions of leaders at all levels to bring about improvement have been concerted and effective and their impact is becoming more pronounced. Planning is sharp and well-focused on how to improve. Self-evaluation is keenly accurate and honest in identifying priorities for improvement. The school is not afraid to be critical of itself and to highlight areas that need improvement promptly, determine action plans and implement them without delay. Realistic but challenging targets are in place. All business and enterprise specialist school targets have been met and the specialist status is having a positive impact on the curriculum, on links with the community and on students' economic well-being.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 by ensuring that more students make the progress they are expected to in these subjects.
- Accelerate the rate at which students make progress in their learning by increasing the amount of good teaching in the school. Do this by spreading the good practice in teaching and assessment that already exists in the school and by:
 - ensuring that learning activities are always matched well to the individual needs and abilities of all students in the class
 - improving teachers' use of questioning so that it is open and probing and used as a tool to extend and deepen, as well as simply to confirm, all students' understanding
 - ensuring that, during lessons, teachers are able to assess students' learning and, where it is not good, they are able to take immediate action to improve it
 - improving the diagnostic quality of marking so that comments provide students with short-term targets about how to improve.
- 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.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

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Attainment on entry in Year 7 is below average. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is low but there is clear evidence of a strong trend of improvement, starting from a very low base. Equally the progress students make in their learning is satisfactory but shows a clear and sustained trend of improvement. The percentage of students making expected progress and those making more than expected progress continues to rise. The progress of individual groups of students, including students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language, students known to be eligible for free school meals, students in local authority care and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is improving and their attainment is rising. While attainment in science and mathematics improved in 2010, attainment in English fell unexpectedly. The school analysed the reasons for this and has taken prompt and effective action to reverse this dip in the current year.

In the lessons observed, progress in learning was judged to be at least satisfactory in most and good in at least half. Lesson observations confirmed that students are developing their understanding and practising their skills. They often showed high levels of enthusiasm and interest and invariably had good attitudes to learning. In lessons where teaching and assessment were judged to be good, students made good progress in their learning. For example, in a religious education lesson on the role of women in society, Year 11 students made good progress in their learning because the teacher used a range of teaching and learning strategies that successfully challenged them to think hard and take an active part in the lesson.

Students demonstrate an excellent understanding of potential risks. They know who to go to if they have any concerns and say that issues they raise are dealt with quickly and

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effectively. Students' good behaviour makes a strong contribution to the improving progress they are making in their learning. Relationships between students are strong; they respect each other, have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong, and show much respect for their teachers. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and students can speak clearly about the opportunities they are given by the school to promote this in term of the formal curriculum, including personal, social, health and economics education (PSHE) and enrichment activities. In particular, they value highly the work of their form tutors. As one pupil commented, 'My form tutor wants me to be the best that I can be.' Many students take positions of leadership and responsibility in school, including peer listening counsellors, prefects, membership of the school council and sports leaders. These enable students to develop valuable skills as well as contribute to the school community. Although attainment is low, students are developing basic literacy and numeracy skills through other curriculum activities and, as a result of a strong provision in information and communication technology (ICT), they are able to apply ICT skills well to work-related tasks. They have a good understanding of what they need to do to prepare for life after school and the number of school leavers who go on to education, employment or training is better than the national average. As a result of a unique system of reward credits linked to bank interest rate, all students are developing an understanding of money management and finance.

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	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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
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

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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How effective is the provision?

Overall, teachers have good subject knowledge, they plan lessons well, making use of a wide range of learning activities that stimulate students' interest and enjoyment, and manage behaviour very effectively.

In the best lessons, pace is good, ICT is used well to enhance learning, there are plenty of opportunities for independent learning and students demonstrate that they can take responsibility for their own learning. In these lessons, assessment for learning is used well, including self and peer assessment that helps students understand how to improve. Open questions that require students to provide detailed responses are used and these are directed and differentiated.

However there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment and some weaknesses.

Questioning is mainly used to confirm whether students can give a 'right' answer, rather than being open and probing, building on prior learning and aimed at extending and deepening understanding. In weaker lessons, there was no expectation that all students should be prepared to contribute.

In weaker lessons there is too much teacher input and not enough opportunity for independent learning.

Few lessons include differentiated tasks that are well matched to students' individual needs and abilities.

Marking was rarely diagnostic and provided too little detail about how students could improve by setting short-term targets.

The effective use of assessment to support learning and to enable students to be responsible for their own learning is inconsistent.

The curriculum is innovative, broad and balanced at both key stages, caters well for the needs and abilities of individual and groups of students and makes a positive contribution to the progress they are making. Lower ability students receive good support to improve their reading, literacy and numeracy skills. Provision for ICT is good. Personal, social, health and economic education for all year groups is excellent and makes a significant contribution to students' welfare, health education and understanding of social and cultural issues. There is a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities for students and the take-up rate for these is good.

There is good continuity between key stages, and students in Key Stage 3 have good opportunities to experience 'taster' lessons from Key Stage 4 options before making their choices. At Key Stage 4, all subjects are exploring how to improve their provision and match it closely to students' needs. For example, the range of courses available at Key Stage 4 in science contributes significantly to the good outcomes in this subject, with attainment just above the national average. In addition to core subjects and traditional academic courses, the school provides a wide range of vocational courses, including hair and beauty, in its excellent on-site Enterprise Centre. These are available to students of all abilities and are attended by students from other schools. The skills-based curriculum has been developed through the school's business and enterprise specialism which is providing a wider range of opportunities to support students' economic well-being. Big Wood School has good links with other schools and colleges in relation to vocational provision and is the

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lead school in the Diploma in Construction, which is taught in a specialist facility in the Enterprise Centre.

The school ensures that all students' needs are met. Transition arrangements between key stages are very strong. The effectiveness of care, guidance and support for potentially vulnerable students is outstanding and there are striking examples of where the school has helped individuals to overcome significant barriers. The school is proactive in driving multi-agency work, often compensating for gaps in the system by, for example, buying in extra mental health support. The key worker system is particularly effective. The well organised arrangements for care contribute to students' good personal development and support their learning. A rigorous system for assessing and monitoring students' well-being and academic progress is in place. Data and tracking is used well to monitor the progress of vulnerable students and groups. Students talk confidently about option choices and information, advice and guidance in relation to progression. They talk positively about how the peer listening counsellors support students with problems and they understand how the rewards and sanctions system contributes to their good behaviour. The school works very hard to improve attendance and, although attendance is only average, most students have a clear understanding of how good attendance contributes to good learning and well-being.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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?

Big Wood School is very well led and managed. The headteacher is proactive and is driving the school forward, raising expectations and instilling ambition in staff, students and their parents. She is ably supported by her senior leadership team and a strongly committed staff. Middle leaders are rising to the challenge and are fully accountable for their areas of responsibility. All staff are absolutely focused on raising attainment. Rigorous monitoring and intervention to support and improve teaching and learning and to raise achievement are in place. Staff have a good understanding of the progress individual students are making and use data well to identify underachievement and to provide appropriate intervention. Evidence shows that tracking has been used well to improve the progress and attainment of students. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and assessment and, in particular its impact on learning, is rigorous. Appropriate support and professional development, including coaching from advanced skills teachers, is helping to improve the quality of teaching and assessment and having a positive impact on students' progress.

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The governing body is well-informed and has a strong input into the school's development and its strategic direction. The school has adopted good practice in relation to all areas connected with safeguarding. Interagency work is exemplary and the school is very proactive in reducing the risk of harm to students in all respects.

The wide range of partnership activities, with other schools and colleges, outside agencies and commercial organisations, makes a strong contribution to the good curriculum and to the improving achievement of students. Many of these partnership links have been developed as a result of the school's business and enterprise specialist status.

Engagement with parents is good and something that the school works very hard at. For example, it actively seeks the support of parents and carers of students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable and achieves 70% attendance at some of its parents' evenings. The school offers a range of activities to parents to involve them in the school and to enable them to support their child's learning effectively.

The school clearly targets areas for improvement in relation to equality of opportunity and has sharply focused strategies in place for closing the gap in achievement between different groups of students - improvement in the attainment of students known to be eligible for free school meals being an indication of this. The school actively promotes community cohesion within the school and the local community and this can be seen in the very good relationships between students from different backgrounds. However, its strategic focus on this area in terms of a clear plan of action and an evaluation of impact is patchy.

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

Views of parents and carers

The response to the parental questionnaire was significantly greater than the national average. Over 30% of parents and carers responded. Responses were overwhelmingly

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positive to all of the questions posed. In particular, parents and carers said they were happy with their child's experience at the school and that the school keeps their child safe. This confirms the judgements made by inspectors. Although parents consider that teaching is good at this school, inspectors feel that this reflects the extent to which pupils enjoy their education and respect their teachers. Inspectors still judge that teaching needs to improve in order to bring about further improvement in pupils' progress and in their attainment.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Big Wood 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 232 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 759 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	75	32	141	61	9	4	5	2
The school keeps my child safe	98	42	128	55	3	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	76	33	127	55	22	9	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	75	32	138	59	11	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	70	30	149	64	8	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	68	29	130	56	26	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	57	25	150	65	17	7	1	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)	80	34	131	56	8	3	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	71	31	145	63	8	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	83	36	119	51	26	11	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	54	23	139	60	27	12	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	82	35	134	58	8	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	93	40	131	56	7	3	1	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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



19 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Big Wood School, Nottingham, NG5 9PJ

The inspection team enjoyed the visit to your school. We were impressed by the new building and understand fully why you said you are so proud of it. We judged Big Wood School to be a satisfactory school with many good features. Your curriculum is good and meets your needs very well. You are very well cared for and those of you with greatest need received excellent care, guidance and support. Teaching is satisfactory but improving strongly. As a result of this, attainment of students in Year 11, although low in comparison to the national average, is improving, and the progress you make in learning, although satisfactory, is also improving securely. You told us that you feel completely safe at school. We judged your behaviour to be and your social, moral, spiritual and cultural development to be good. You know how to lead a healthy life style, you contribute well to your school community and the school ensures you are well prepared for your future life beyond school.

In order to improve the school, we have asked your headteacher to raise attainment in English and mathematics by improving the rate at which you make progress in your learning and by improving the quality of teaching and assessment. In particular, we have asked her to ensure the following things.

Learning activities are always matched well to your abilities.

Teachers' questioning makes you think hard.

When teachers judge that you are not making good progress in lessons, they take immediate action to make sure you are.

The comments you receive on marked work are helpful in enabling you to improve.

You can all help by attending school regularly (you cannot achieve if you are not at school), by working as hard as you can, contributing fully when teachers ask questions, and informing teachers when you do not understand a topic or when you do not understand why your work is not as good as you thought.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates

Her Majesty's Inspector

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