

Nether Stowe School A Specialist Mathematics & Computing College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124409
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	359662
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Trevor Riddiough 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	686
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Warran Bradford
Headteacher	Ruth Poppleton
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 32 lessons including four joint observations with a member of the senior leadership team, three tutor groups and two assemblies. Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, groups of students, and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at the tracking of students' progress, performance data, students' work, whole-school and subject development plans, numerous policies, school documents and case studies. Completed questionnaires from 32 staff and 117 parents and carers were received and analysed.

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

- To what degree has the school resolved students' weaker achievement in English and mathematics compared to other subjects at Key Stage 4?
- How well have leaders at all levels ensured rigour in their evaluations to bring about improvements in teaching and learning, and thus the rates of progress that students are making, both in the main school and in the sixth form?
- How well is assessment used to promote the progress that students make?
- To what extent does the curriculum meet the needs of students of all abilities, both in the main school and in the sixth form?

Information about the school

Nether Stowe School is smaller than the average sized secondary school. It takes students predominantly from the areas of Curborough and Stowe. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is also above average. The school population is largely White British and very few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few are at the early stages of learning English. The school was awarded specialist mathematics and computing status in 2008, covering mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). The school has achieved national recognition for its work in Basic skills, Healthy Schools, and Information, Advice and Guidance. The school hosts an autistic resource base, managed by the local authority, for up to six children who arrive at varying stages in their school career.

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

3

Main findings

Nether Stowe is a satisfactory school where the care, guidance and support for students are a strength. Its senior leaders understand the school's main strengths and areas for development and are successfully accelerating the pace of improvement. Current data confirm that students' attainment is improving rapidly, although there is still some variation in the performance of subjects, notably in design and technology and religious education (RE), and a few students do not achieve the highest grades of which they are capable. However, in these cases there are strategies in place to tackle these variations and the gaps are closing.

A number of developments have contributed to this improving picture. Teaching has improved and this is reflected in the satisfactory or better progress seen in lessons. The accuracy of assessments has improved, although the quality of feedback through marking and orally in lessons is variable and does not always point to specific areas of learning that need to improve. Students' attitudes to their learning have also improved and in many instances their positive approach makes a good contribution to their learning. The school has worked hard to improve attendance rates, which are now above average. Most students enjoy their lessons within the school's cohesive and supportive community and at the end of Year 11 most progress into education, employment or training.

The curriculum has been specifically designed to meet the needs of as many students as possible. The impact of the specialist subjects is evident in wider opportunities for students to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills and the greater confidence of staff in the use of ICT to enhance learning. Good partnerships with other local schools have broadened the vocational pathways available. Enrichment opportunities for students are wide and varied, for example in sport, and there are good links with other businesses and universities to broaden their experiences. The curriculum is flexible and is regularly reviewed and tailored particularly for students who are vulnerable because of their circumstances, for example, in the establishment of accredited courses within the 'student engagement project' for students at risk of exclusion. This reflects the school's inclusive approach and its commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity to its students. These curricular features are having a positive impact on the students' personal as well as academic development.

The headteacher provides clear direction and has managed the school well through a period of change, making good use of partner schools and local authority consultants. Target setting has been strengthened and robust use of data is helping to identify underachievement early so that appropriate action can be taken. The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate, although the effectiveness of subject leaders varies and the judgments in some subject areas are not linked explicitly to how well students do. The school's capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further and ensure that all students make good progress, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, by:
 - raising the quality of teaching and learning so that the large majority of lessons are good or better
 - challenging all the students in each class with tasks that match their level of understanding and their capacity to learn
 - strengthening the consistency of advice and guidance to students on how to accelerate progress in lessons.
- Reduce the variation in subject performance across the school by:
 - sharing the good practice that exists in teaching
 - ensuring that all subject leaders use data and other information effectively to evaluate performance in their department and make improvements.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2010 was below average for many key measures, and the percentage of students achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics fell to below average. However, in the current year the percentage of students that have already gained, through early examination entry, a grade C or above in English and mathematics has risen significantly and is now broadly average. The percentage gaining two science GCSEs has also risen. This represents satisfactory progress, given the students' starting points. Inspectors' own observations showed progress in lessons to be consistently at least satisfactory and in some lessons good. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress and generally benefit from effective academic and pastoral support, as do those known to be eligible for free school meals. The school's data show a clearly improving trend of attainment which is set to rise again in the coming year.

Students feel safe in school and they have confidence their concerns will be listened to. Students are full of enthusiasm for the 'Blue-tie Buddies' who act as student counsellors. Students behave well in lessons and around school and treat each other and school facilities with respect. Students are encouraged to live healthily. There is a good up-take of meals from the school canteen, and students know what constitutes healthy eating. The curriculum contributes well in this respect through its personal, social and health education programmes, and a large majority of students are involved in a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities. Many take responsibility in school as prefects, and work with primary school pupils in physical education and science projects. There are many examples of students' generosity and spontaneity in response to national challenges and victims of natural disasters. Many take part in concerts and other entertainment for the wider community. Students are well prepared for the next stage in their education or progression into employment. They develop good social skills and enterprise events provide good contact with local firms, as does work experience for Year 10 students.

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Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respond well to opportunities to reflect on achievements, natural wonders and predicaments affecting human society in different situations in other parts of the world and in this country. The great majority recognise the need to take responsibility for one's own actions. Multicultural awareness is developed well. Students visit Leicester to experience the broad ethnic mix of that community and the RE curriculum includes comparisons with other prominent religions.

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	3
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	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and is still improving. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and use a suitable range of learning activities to promote students' learning. Effective use is made of resources to enhance learning, including ICT. In most lessons assessment procedures, including the use of tracking data, are used to enable teachers to plan effectively, but this is not universal. Furthermore, the planning to build on students' capabilities, particularly for the most-able, is not consistently applied across all subjects and as a result, not all students make the progress of which they are capable. In some lessons, guidance given through teachers' marking on how to improve is too variable to have full impact on students' progress.

The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is well organised and provides a broad range of options to meet the needs of all learners. For example, triple science, early entry options and GCSE

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based routes are available for students of higher abilities. There is an increasing range of vocational options and although the uptake for these courses is relatively low, it is rising. Partnership arrangements with local providers serve to widen this vocational provision further. An alternative curriculum focused on level 1 courses caters well for individual students where achievement and well-being are of equal importance. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities with good uptake and sport is notably strong. Trips, visits and visiting practitioners enhance provision further. For example, in a sport lesson, an ex-student returned and discussed his role as a personal trainer within the context of the gym that inspired and stimulated students' interest in the world of work.

The school is able to point out striking examples where well-targeted support has made a difference in improving individual students' attendance, well-being and achievement. One student commented, 'The school is very supportive and helped me deal with my issues. They have helped me tremendously.' Effective links with specialist agencies support specific individual students when required. Teaching assistants are well deployed and provide effective support. Classroom support plans for each targeted student are in place, however as this is new, the full impact is yet to be realised. There is well-targeted intervention work to boost literacy across the curriculum and the English department is taking a leading role to aid and support the further development of literacy. Transition from the primary school is well managed and students speak highly about the invaluable support and guidance provided over careers and sixth form choices.

Students in the autistic resource base are very largely integrated into mainstream lessons, with support as necessary that typically reduces as the impact of the resource base's work grows. Staff always consider the specific needs of the students but apply a working principle that their students are treated in the same way as all others. Assessment data show that attainment on entry to the autistic resource base is variable, in line with the students' previous circumstances, but current students are achieving at above average levels and all have made at least good progress since joining. The success of the resource base is measured by the proposal to admit two current Year 11 students to the sixth form, and the success in meeting its aim 'to enable the students to enjoy success in life' is therefore very evident.

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?

The headteacher has established a clear direction for the school, underpinned by a commitment to improving achievement. The senior team is working effectively in planning and implementing improvements, but has not yet established universally good teaching

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across the school. It is supported by a team of middle leaders whose skills are at differing stages of development. The use of assessment to set targets and track students' progress against them has had a major impact on improving standards. However, there are some inconsistencies in the use of assessment to match work to the abilities of all students so that all can make good progress. Strategic planning is sometimes hindered by inconsistent self-evaluation of provision, which makes it less straightforward to identify the correct actions for improvement. For example, overgenerous evaluations of teaching and learning make it difficult to target some of the specific aspects of teaching that require further development.

The governing body is well informed and has recently developed a stronger focus on addressing academic needs as well as the pastoral focus that it previously held. The school communicates effectively with parents and carers, especially those who are hard to reach. It keeps them well informed about its work through, newsletters, leaflets and its web site. Procedures for the safeguarding of students are under constant review and the school's approach exceeds statutory requirements. Community cohesion is strong within the school, and it is now widening its influence at local, regional and international levels but these are not yet established to the same extent.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Standards in the sixth form are average, and students make satisfactory overall progress in response to satisfactory teaching. Students understand their current standards and end-of-course targets. Many, but not all, know how to reach these targets. There are examples of good practice where independent working, good use of assessment and focused tasks generate good progress. In all lessons, students' commitment and concentration make a

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good contribution to learning. In a few lessons the very small number of students inhibits the full impact of group discussion.

The school has expanded the curriculum to meet the needs of lower attainers so that it includes vocational and applied subjects at different levels. This forms part of the '5-school partnership' in the local area which ensures that a good range of AS and A2 subjects are available across the locality. Higher attainers can also take part in extended projects. Level 2 courses in English and mathematics are offered throughout the sixth form to remedy any previous shortfall in these qualifications. The broadening of the curriculum to meet the needs of all students has led to an increase in the number of students seeking sixth form places and, for the first time, students from other schools are currently showing interest in joining the sixth form.

Sixth form students support younger students as mentors while others act as ambassadors and sports and mathematics leaders. They play a leading role in the school council and feel that they have a platform for having their views considered. Sixth form students say that they feel safe and they understand their role in promoting safety for younger students.

Students are supported to take an interest in following sixth form courses from Year 10 onwards. Information for students and their parents and carers includes a prospectus, information evenings and access to a specialist careers adviser. When they begin sixth form studies, students are monitored throughout an induction period. This may result in changes to their chosen subjects or other intervention to ensure that they will profit fully from their time in the sixth form. The students like the support they receive. They appreciate the accessibility of teachers and say they can always ask for help.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Students say that changes are beginning to emerge and the impact on standards and progress, while not yet strong, is on a gradient of steady improvement. Leaders are committed and knowledgeable in the areas of support for post-16 students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

The parents and carers who completed questionnaires were generally positive about the school and their child's education. A very small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspectors followed up these concerns: they judged that the school has effective policies in place with regard to behaviour and procedures are followed consistently which contribute to the good behaviour of students in the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Nether Stowe School A Specialist Mathematics & Computing College 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 117 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 686 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	23	75	64	8	7	3	3
The school keeps my child safe	38	32	71	61	4	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	26	22	74	63	10	9	4	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	25	73	62	7	6	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	24	21	76	65	10	9	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	19	76	65	10	9	4	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	12	86	74	7	6	5	4
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)	17	15	80	68	7	6	4	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	24	73	62	10	9	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	16	75	64	12	10	7	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	13	78	67	9	8	7	6
The school is led and managed effectively	22	19	72	62	11	9	9	8
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	32	27	72	62	10	9	2	2

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

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.



18 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Nether Stowe School A Specialist Mathematics & Computing College, Lichfield, WS13 7NB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to me and the other inspectors when we inspected your school. Your views were very helpful and we enjoyed our discussions with those of you we spoke to in lessons, in meetings and around the school.

The school provides you with a satisfactory quality of education and some areas are good. Standards are broadly average and rising and you are making satisfactory and sometimes good progress in your lessons. Your school is now making efforts to carry out improvements so that you can make good progress in all your lessons. You receive good guidance and support, and staff work hard to ensure your academic and personal development. You show a positive approach to your work and your attendance is good. This shows how much you enjoy school. You clearly enjoy a good range of learning opportunities beyond school, especially those in sport.

Your school is led effectively by your headteacher and her team of leaders and managers, who are determined to ensure that it provides the best for every one of you. To help improve your school further, we have asked your headteacher, the staff and the governing body to raise your achievement in all subjects, but especially in English, mathematics and science, by:

- ensuring that your teachers plan carefully so that all of you make the greatest possible progress in lessons
- making sure that you experience consistently good teaching
- giving you consistently clear advice on how to improve your work.

You have a part to play and you can really help your school by ensuring that you do not settle for anything other than your best, and that you follow up the comments and suggestions that your teachers make to help you to improve your work. I wish you all success in the future and hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Nether Stowe School.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough

Her Majesty's Inspector

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