

Wolgarston High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124415
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	395577
Inspection dates	18–19 April 2012
Lead inspector	Kevin Sheldrick 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	814
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Howard Stemp
Headteacher	Philip Tapp
Date of previous school inspection	4 February 2009
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Age group	13–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

John Leigh

Additional Inspector

Lenford White

Additional Inspector

Frances Le Pla

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed 48 lessons taught by 47 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at communications with parents and carers, assessment information and the school's development planning. The questionnaires from students, staff and 134 parents and carers were scrutinised.

Information about the school

Wolgarston High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It serves a large geographical, largely rural area. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well-below average. The percentage of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very small. The school meets the current floor standard. The school has recently been awarded Dyslexia Friendly status and has also gained the Leading Parent Partnership Award.

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

- The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Behaviour, including attendance, has improved, although the progress made enhancing achievement and teaching has been more limited. These improvements, in the context of having to manage reductions in staffing, are evidence that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve and that leadership and management are satisfactory. The school was not judged to be good because students do not experience enough consistently good teaching and, therefore, achieve satisfactorily. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Achievement of all groups is satisfactory. Following disappointing recent examination results, inspectors judge that recent improvements in the quality of teaching and curriculum provision are resulting in students making better progress.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Approximately half the lessons observed were good or better. In the more effective lessons, teachers' questioning and activities matched students' differing needs and abilities well. In the less effective lessons, these features were less apparent and, at times, teachers talked too much, gave answers too quickly, and students were not always encouraged to solve problems for themselves.
- Behaviour has improved and is good and virtually no students are being excluded. Students have very positive attitudes towards learning. Attendance has also improved and is now above average. Parents, carers and students spoke positively about the effective role the 'family and student services centre' plays in ensuring all students are well cared for and feel safe.
- Leaders are managers have adopted a comprehensive range of challenging targets to drive improvement. Leaders, including the governing body, are realistic about the school's current strengths and weaknesses and have taken action that is reducing the gaps in achievement of different groups, particularly for boys and those with statements, which had become apparent. Leaders recognise that the school's monitoring and evaluation of teaching is insufficiently rigorous. Improvement plans lack sufficient detail, for instance, there are no milestones that can be used to check progress towards reaching longer term targets.
- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory and it is improving.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching and learning consistently good or better by:
 - using the comprehensive assessment information about students' performance more effectively to plan lessons that meet students differing capabilities better
 - ensuring students have greater opportunity to choose and do work that is more challenging
 - improving teachers' use of questioning so that all students think more deeply about the key ideas in lessons and also reflect more on the significance of what they learn
 - ensuring teachers avoid giving answers too quickly and ensure that students solve problems for themselves
 - improving the pace of learning through strategies that encourage faster working so students progress more quickly and more time is available to apply their learning in a range of contexts.
 - ensuring students receive high-quality feedback consistently and have opportunities to respond to it.

- Develop the effectiveness of leadership and management, particularly related to teaching and learning, by:
 - ensuring lesson observations are focused more on the progress different groups of students make
 - using a more comprehensive range of information to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning
 - ensuring more rapid improvement occurs as a result of more effective monitoring of teaching
 - improve the rigour of school improvement planning by including milestones, more precise timescales and details of who is responsible for the actions and the monitoring of provision and its impact.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter school with levels of attainment that are broadly average. The very large majority of parents and carers think their children make good progress. However, over the last three years, the students have achieved satisfactorily because teaching and learning have been satisfactory. Students' literacy skills are being developed satisfactorily. While attainment has been average in recent years, there has been some unevenness in the outcomes for students. For instance, in 2011, the GCSE results revealed that boys, particularly those that entered the school with below-average attainment, made less progress than other groups. This was also the case for students with statements of special needs. As a result, a below-average proportion of students gained 5A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Current evidence shows that the school is using additional out-of-lessons support effectively to close the gaps in attainment and accelerate all students' progress. Consequently, the school is expecting a noticeable result

improvement in 2012 with standards close to average. Boys, disabled students and those who have special educational needs, including those with a statement, have benefited from the much-improved identification of their needs; better tracking of their progress and more effective use of support and guidance to eradicate any underachievement and accelerate their learning. As a result, these students now make progress that is in line with their peers.

In lessons, students, generally, listen well to their teachers, including when teachers talk for quite long periods. At times, students were observed to be off-task, talking with their classmates, because the work set was insufficiently challenging, or they knew the teacher would solve the problem that had been set. In more-effective lessons, students worked hard because teachers had high expectations, provided work at a range of levels and insisted that students solved problems for themselves. Students were observed to be making accelerated progress in a history lesson, when students enjoyed the challenge of identifying different views on the Treaty of Versailles within just 60 seconds. Generally, students progress well in vocational lessons because of the constant focus on work at three different levels, so work is consistently challenging. This contrasted with some other subjects, where the whole class focused on the same outcome. For instance, students were observed to be making less progress in mathematics lessons because too much time was devoted to the whole-class working through text-book questions at the same rate. When given the opportunity, students communicate their ideas clearly and with enthusiasm. Sixth-formers are making satisfactory progress although it is improving largely because the school has a well-established, consistent focus on students achieving challenging targets.

Quality of teaching

Parents, carers and students have a generally positive view of the effectiveness of teaching. Inspectors judge that teaching and learning are satisfactory and there is not enough good teaching to ensure students make consistently good progress over time. Inspectors agree with the few parents and carers who expressed concerns about some teaching that did not challenge students sufficiently.

Students experience many good lessons, when teachers combine their strong subject knowledge with well-planned lessons that promote effective learning. Teachers' questioning is often highly effective, for instance, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, student concentration levels were impressively high because the students knew that, at any time, they might be required to respond. In a sixth-form psychology lesson the teacher's probing questioning, expertly, identified students' misconceptions and deepened students' understanding of the stages of human development. Such approaches were in marked contrast to the questioning in other lessons. Too great a reliance on willing volunteers meant that some students did not have to concentrate and think sufficiently about the teacher's questions.

In the highly effective lessons, students have the opportunity to excel, often by being able to make choices. In the less effective lessons, the whole class tends to work at the same pace, undertaking the same activity and the opportunity to make choices is too limited. The effective lessons promoted students' spiritual, moral, social, and

cultural development well. For instance, in a Year 10 English lesson about a Shakespeare play, students' interest was enhanced by them being able to apply their understanding to how the role of women had changed over time. Inspectors noted missed opportunities to promote students' spiritual development because time was not devoted to allowing students to reflect on the significance of their learning.

The planned curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to teaching and students' progress. Teachers are beginning to promote students' literacy needs satisfactorily, for instance, the emphasis on learning key words is particularly beneficial for those who have dyslexia. Students praised the role of marking in English, but in other subjects it is often perfunctory. In the sixth form, inspectors observed comparable teaching and learning strengths and weaknesses, although, in this phase, there is a greater emphasis on the promotion of independent learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students behave well around the school, including where there are relatively low levels of adult supervision. In lessons, behaviour is almost always good, including in the minority of lessons when the teaching is not appropriately challenging. Students' attitudes to learning are very positive and they show perseverance, initiative and are keen to do well. They can think and learn for themselves, when given the opportunity to do so. The very large majority of parents and carers think that behaviour is good, although a minority of lower-attaining students indicated that, very occasionally, lessons are affected by some less-than-perfect behaviour. Behaviour is managed well by the majority of teachers, but there are occasional inconsistencies in how the school's behaviour management policy is applied. Virtually all parents and carers think that their children are safe in school and the arrangements for ensuring the smooth transfer of students from the middle schools contribute well to students feeling secure when they arrive in Year 9. In response to comments in a parental questionnaire, inspectors investigated the amount of adult support available to statemented students. The school recognises that there is currently quite a sudden reduction in the amount of support provided for this group compared to that given in their middle schools. Inspectors judge that the amount of provision made for those with statements is adequate; however, the school is wisely considering the further steps it can take to ensure a smoother transition. Incidents of bullying, including any that are homophobic, are very low and only very rarely are these not resolved to the satisfaction of parents, carers or students.

Attendance is improving and is now above average. The school is monitoring the attendance of different groups carefully and is taking steps to reduce the gaps in attendance further, particularly for students who are eligible for free school meals. The attendance of sixth formers is high. The curriculum provides students with many opportunities to consider safety and students are made well aware of the dangers of making too much information available on social networking sites.

Leadership and management

Leaders have demonstrated a satisfactory capacity to improve. For example, they have ensured improvements in provision are leading to rising standards during a

challenging time of reduced funding and staff reductions. The behaviour and safety aspects are managed well, so improvement has ensued.

In response to the dip in results in 2011, the governing body introduced a scrutiny committee to hold senior leaders to account further for students' performance. The changes that have resulted have improved aspects of leadership, particularly around how assessment information is used, to monitor the effectiveness of all aspects of the school's performance. Senior leaders recognise that there is a need to accelerate improvements to teaching and learning. Although professional development has resulted in improved classroom practice and accelerating progress, particularly for boys and disabled students and those with special educational needs, there is a recognition that monitoring and evaluation is not sufficiently robust. Rather too much reliance has been placed on the monitoring of lessons, when teachers know that they are to be observed, rather than on strategies and comprehensive use of information that provide insights into the teaching as experienced by students, particularly the progress different students make in lessons.

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced and promotes students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development suitably. The curriculum experienced by students is improving because the development of inter-connected learning pathways enables students to choose a suitable mix of academic and vocational courses that are matched to their specific needs and aspirations.

Leaders are promoting equal opportunities satisfactorily. For example, improved provision is successfully starting to close the gaps in the performance of different groups. Action has been taken to ensure that provision improves dyslexic students' literacy skills more effectively. The school has also taken effective steps to involve parents and carers better in decision-making, through an influential forum. Leaders are tackling discrimination suitably in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony. The Family and Student Services Centre is involving parents and carers successfully who traditionally have not been involved in their children's education, leading to improvements in attendance and increasing their involvement in their children's learning. The large majority of parents and carers are supportive of the school's leadership. The arrangements for safeguarding meet government requirements.

Leaders of the sixth form are improving the quality of education provided by developing a curriculum that complements other provision available locally. A strategic plan exists for this phase and it has similar strengths and weaknesses as the main school plan. It contains comprehensive and challenging targets, but lacks the detail needed to ensure senior leaders are held to account fully.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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 school converters. Secondary schools include secondary school converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special school 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.

20 April 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Wolgarston High School, Stafford, ST19 5RX

I would like to thank all of you for the warm welcome you gave us when inspectors visited your school recently. A special thanks goes to those of you who completed the questionnaires and to those we interviewed. The perceptive feedback you provided influenced the decisions we reached.

We decided that the overall effectiveness of your school is satisfactory. Attainment is average, as is the progress you make whilst at school. The reason for this is simple - you experience teaching that is satisfactory. Although teaching is satisfactory, about half the lessons we observed were good or better. We were pleased to be reassured that students currently in Year 11 are on course to attain much better results than was the case last year. Although your behaviour is not perfect, it is good. The very large majority of you behave well and are polite and considerate. You have very positive attitudes to learning and your attendance is above average.

We were impressed with how well you answer teachers' questions and your ability to explain your thinking when given the opportunity to do so. You all know your challenging targets and some of you know what to do to reach them. Where teaching is very effective, we observed that you often have the opportunity to make choices and that you are encouraged to show resilience in trying to solve problems. Where lessons are less effective, it is usually because teachers talk for too long and do not ensure that you work hard enough. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not always ensure work is matched properly to your different abilities and there is sometimes too great a reliance on learning from a text book.

We found that there are strengths in your school's planning, for instance, the school is highly ambitious about the further improvements it wants. However, the school improvement plan could be sharper and we think leaders could do more to ensure the best practice in some lessons is adopted more widely across the school. We also want leaders to use a wider range of strategies and a more-comprehensive range of information to judge teaching quality so that you all learn effectively. You can help improve your school by making the choices that ensure you are challenged well in lessons and by continuing to show resilience. We wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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