

Washington School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108865
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	384890
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2012
Lead inspector	Brian Blake 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	742
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dorothy Butler
Executive Headteacher	John Hallworth
Date of previous school inspection	16 June 2010
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Introduction

Inspection team

Brian Blake
Lyn Field
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Her Majesty's Inspector
Additional Inspector
Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with one day's notice. It was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 as a fifth monitoring visit, and was converted to an inspection under section 5 at the end of the first day. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a total of 18 part-lessons, which involved seeing the work of 18 different teachers. The lead inspector took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey and took these into account as part of the inspection. Inspectors observed all aspects of the work of the school. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, the Chair of the Governing Body and a senior officer from the local authority. Informal discussions were also held with other staff and a significant number of students during lessons and around the school. No Ofsted questionnaires for parents and carers, students and staff were used, but inspectors considered the most recent school-based student and staff surveys from the autumn term 2011.

Information about the school

This community secondary school is located in the Washington area of Sunderland local authority. It was judged to require special measures at its last inspection.

The school, which is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school, has specialist status in technology. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is almost twice the national average. Almost all students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well above average. The school has achieved the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. It holds a number of awards, including Investors in People, Quality in Study Support Mark, Artsmark Silver and the Financial Management Standards in Schools.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Students’ achievement, which was judged inadequate at the previous inspection, is now satisfactory and improving quickly. This year’s results are on course to be in line with national averages for the first time since 2009, with good improvements achieved, by early entries for GCSE, in the proportion of students gaining a good grade in English and mathematics. The progress and achievement of students with identified learning needs are also gathering pace and are at least satisfactory. There remain a small number of subjects where results do not match consistently the national averages. The vast majority of students say that they feel safe and that they enjoy attending school.
- The quality of teaching has improved throughout the monitoring period since the previous inspection and is now almost always satisfactory or better, with an increasing proportion that is good or outstanding. Some satisfactory teaching still has too much ‘teacher talk’, with too little time for individual student work. The use of additional adult support in lessons is working well, but there is variability across the school in the way teaching assistants are used in lessons. At its best it focuses support on specific students and addresses specific learning, social and/or behaviour needs; sometimes it provides more general and, therefore less effective, support.
- Senior leaders and managers have made good progress since the first monitoring inspection visit in addressing identified weaknesses in teaching, behaviour and attainment. Robust procedures have been used to monitor teaching and these are linked very clearly to the developing role of heads of department. The governing body has also made good progress in holding the

school to account for the rate of progress being achieved. Recent work on developing the ability of heads of department to self-evaluate accurately and target weak teaching and student underperformance is gathering pace, but has yet to be rolled out across the whole school. Overall, the school now has the capacity to sustain these improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in all subjects to average or better by:
 - continuing to monitor students' progress and attainment across the school, putting into place targeted action when underperformance is identified
 - developing the evaluation and monitoring role of all heads of department, to ensure that there is targeted action planning to raise attainment for all groups of students.

- Raise the overall profile of teaching quality to consistently good or better, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use lesson time to maximise student learning by reducing the amount of unnecessary teacher talk, providing more time for individual and independent student work
 - ensuring that all teaching assistants focus specifically on identified outcomes for those students who they support in lessons.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students join the school with below average attainment in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress varies across different groups but, after a lengthy period of inadequate progress stretching back to the previous inspection, it is now satisfactory. The best progress is made by lower and average attaining girls, and by those students identified on the school action special educational needs register. The school recognises that the progress of boys and higher attaining students is slower than elsewhere in the school, and it is now making improvements to tackle this issue. Steps taken to improve progress and raise attainment have been particularly successful in the two core subjects of English and mathematics. Cross-curricular work in literacy and numeracy, including raising standards in reading and writing, has made a significant contribution to these improvements. There is now a clear trend of improvement across the school, with the current Year 11, for example, making good overall progress. The Year 11 early entry data show that the overall percentage increase in attainment between 2011 and 2012 for students achieving A* to C grades in GCSE is 13.1% in English, and 3.5% in mathematics (this figure does yet not include the top set of 20 students, all of whom should achieve A* to C grades). This means that the school expects that students will achieve standards in these subjects broadly in line with national averages for the first time since 2009. In other subjects, there remains some variability in performance, with some yet to achieve in line with the national averages.

The pace of students' learning in lessons is satisfactory overall. Progress slows when teachers spend too much time providing explanations and over-directing students' learning. This has the effect of lowering students' expectations and diminishing their ability to work independently. Learning and progress are good when teachers set tasks which challenge thinking and extend understanding beyond that which only reflects previously acquired knowledge; this is happening in an increasing proportion of lessons, and it is positively influencing students' motivation to learn and achieve. Students with identified learning needs, including those with disabilities and/or special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress.

Quality of teaching

The overall quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now nearly always satisfactory or better. There is now a much higher proportion of teaching that is good or better than at any time since the previous inspection. These improvements now mean that the vast majority of students experience teaching that manages students' behaviour effectively, generates interest and enthusiasm for learning, raises personal expectations and enables all abilities to make at least satisfactory or better progress in lessons. Teachers now set challenging tasks that take account of prior learning and the progress made in previous lessons. There are still a few occasions, however, when lesson activities and tasks move too quickly for some students, missing out vital stages in consolidating important ideas and concepts. This results in these students struggling to keep pace with what is expected of them, as well as slowing down the pace of their learning. However, the overwhelming majority of teachers have become much more skilled at recognising the difficulties that some students have, and are making suitable adaptations to the type of work provided, or to the time given to complete the work. These improvements in the quality of teaching are clearly evident in withdrawal work undertaken with those students with disabilities and/or special educational needs, where their motivation to learn, and the standards they are achieving in key literacy and numeracy skills are improving rapidly. The school-based surveys completed by staff and students support these positive views about teaching.

Students make the best progress in those lessons where teachers use their subject knowledge to ask probing and more open-ended questions, which help to develop the students' own thinking skills. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations of the students, and require them to take increasing more responsibility for their work. These lessons also make a significant contribution to the students' behaviour, their attitudes to learning and in their developing self-awareness of what they are capable of achieving. The vast majority of students say they enjoy their lessons because teachers are making the content interesting and relevant to their needs. The school is yet to achieve this quality of teaching consistently in all lessons, but the improvements made since the last inspection are impressive and have made a significant impact on achievement and behaviour throughout the school. Teachers' marking has also improved considerably since the previous inspection, although some still lacks the level of detail that helps the students to know clearly what they have done well, and what else they need to do to make it even better. Overall, however, the students are developing a better appreciation of what they can achieve. In those lessons where teaching is satisfactory, there remains a tendency for too much teacher talk, with questioning that does little to challenge the students

to use their prior knowledge to show the depth of their understanding. Although there are new systems in place to provide tailored literacy support for the students, several of these initiatives are at an early stage of implementation.

The use of additional adult support in lessons is working well, but there is variability across the school in the way these teaching assistants are used in lessons. The work of teaching assistants is most effective when there is a focus on support for targeted students and work on specific learning, social or behaviour needs.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

At the previous inspection, students' behaviour was satisfactory. However, at that time there was a significant minority of students whose behaviour was poor; since then more coherent whole-school behaviour management systems have helped reduce significantly the number of recorded incidents of challenging and disruptive behaviour. There is still a very small number who continue to challenge the authority of some teachers in lessons, disrupting their own and others' learning, but this number has reduced steadily since the previous inspection and does not detract from the consistently satisfactory or better behaviour now seen throughout the school from almost all students. These improvements are confirmed by all those students who spoke with inspectors and in the small number of survey responses from parents and carers using Ofsted's online 'Parent View'.

Students are punctual for lessons and are generally well prepared to start work promptly. The overwhelming majority show positive attitudes to their learning and are able to work cooperatively. The vast majority of students say they feel safe in school and that, when bullying occasionally occurs, it is promptly and effectively dealt with by staff. The detailed records of bullying, racist or more general behavioural incidents show that these are small in number and are reducing.

Students are confident that they are taught to assess risks and they know how to keep themselves safe, including e-safety when using the internet. Younger students value the praise and reward systems, and believe that the school's sanctions help lessons to run smoothly.

Leadership and management

Since the previous inspection, senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, have been appropriately focused on improving the achievement of all students, the quality of teaching and the overall quality of leadership and management across the school. Although the school got off to a slow start in all of these areas, progress has gathered pace since the first monitoring inspection, with the school now showing that it has the capacity to sustain these improvements. Senior leaders and managers, and the governing body, have been particularly successful in developing a shared vision among the staff for continual improvement, which, in turn, has helped to improve the quality of self-review across the school.

The quality of middle management, which was judged inadequate at the previous inspection, is now at least satisfactory overall and it is improving. The monitoring and evaluation of middle management, by senior leaders and managers, are gaining

momentum. As a result, some departments have made rapid improvement in assessing the quality of their provision, and identifying where further improvements are needed. Following some recent pilot work to develop the ability of heads of department, alongside their subject staff, to evaluate the impact of provision on students' attainment, a clear roll-out strategy for all departments is beginning to emerge. This work has been closely aligned to targeted professional development work across the school. As a result, all staff, and especially middle leaders, are now far more adept at identifying aspects of their current practice that need to develop to maintain and accelerate improvements.

School action planning has also improved and the most recent is extensive and robust in nature, and of a quality that enables the governing body and local authority to hold senior leaders and managers to account. The targeted monitoring work of the governing body is now of good quality and it is continuing to improve as individual members develop their understanding of how they can both hold the school to account for its work, and provide the necessary support for all students and staff. Its developing work in holding middle managers to account has helped to consolidate the accurate self-evaluation of provision in the school.

This range of focused management activities has had a direct influence on the quality of teaching and students' achievement. This work has also improved students' self-esteem, their behaviour and their appreciation and understanding of how they need to develop as individuals in order to leave school well prepared for the challenges of adult life. Senior leaders and managers are aware of the areas where occasional inadequate teaching may occur, and where there is too little teaching that is good or better, and they are continuing to provide support and challenge in order to improve its quality.

The curriculum is satisfactory and is being reviewed and adapted to reflect more accurately the needs of the students. Provision currently reflects a suitable balance of traditional and vocationally oriented options.

The school takes all reasonable actions to ensure the safety of its students, and good quality supervision makes a significant contribution to this. All statutory safety and safeguarding requirements are met. The school tackles incidents of discrimination promptly, and its positive approach to equal opportunities is seen in the way the staff and students interact throughout the school.

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 academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
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.



22 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Washington School, NE7 2AA

On behalf of the inspectors who recently visited your school, I should like to thank you for the way you behaved throughout our visit. You, and your parents and carers, will be pleased to know that the inspectors have judged the school to no longer require special measures.

The key findings from the inspection are as follows.

- Washington School provides you with a satisfactory and improving quality of education.
- From low standards when you join the school, the overwhelming majority of you make satisfactory or better progress in your learning. Improvements in English and mathematics are impressive, and while other subjects are also improving we are asking the school to quicken and maintain this pace of progress in all subjects.
- Teaching is now consistently satisfactory and it is improving quickly. Some teaching is now good or better, and senior leaders and managers are aware that all teaching should be of this standard. We are, therefore, asking the school to raise all teaching to be at least good.
- Your behaviour has improved significantly since the previous inspection. It is now satisfactory with a lot that is good.
- The school's leaders and managers, including the governing body, are now tackling underachievement, poor behaviour and inadequate teaching effectively. There is a shared vision for further improvements and we have asked leaders to further raise your attainment and to improve teaching even more. Those of you we spoke to confirm that it is now more enjoyable to attend school, and that teachers and other adults are taking a keen interest in helping you to achieve the very best that you can.

We wish you all continued success at school.

Yours sincerely

Brian Blake
Her Majesty's Inspector

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