

Big Wood School

Bewcastle Road, Warren Hill, Nottingham, NG5 9PJ

Inspection dates

13–14 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- The standards students achieve in key subjects including English, mathematics, science and languages are not improving.
- The progress students make from their different starting points in both mathematics and English has been consistently inadequate over time.
- Students eligible for free school meals and supported by pupil premium funding and those who are disabled and have special educational needs make considerably less progress than other students.
- The quality of teaching has been inadequate over time. Not enough teaching is good or outstanding, especially in mathematics, to reverse long-term underachievement quickly.
- Teaching does not stretch or challenge the most able to enable them to reach their potential.
- Attendance is too low, particularly for older students and those at risk of underachieving.
- Leadership in key subjects, including English, mathematics and languages, has been weak for some time. Leaders have not carried out their responsibilities effectively
- Leaders' assessments of the school's strengths and weaknesses are not accurate; often they are over generous about their effectiveness. Consequently, they have been too slow in dealing with weaknesses in teaching, achievement and leadership. Leaders are not demonstrating the capacity to raise standards to an appropriate level.
- Governors do not challenge school leaders sufficiently or check the effectiveness of the school's improvement plans.

The school has the following strengths

- School leaders have improved behaviour swiftly; this has resulted in a dramatic reduction in temporary exclusions and improved attitudes in lessons.
- Relationships between staff and students are mostly good.

The headteacher has provided strong and clear expectations for students regarding their conduct and for teachers in relation to the standards they are expected to demonstrate.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 32 lessons, including three shared with senior leaders. A 'learning walk' was also carried out with senior leaders. Three personal, social, health and education (PSHE) lessons were observed, as well as one assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, pastoral leaders, the Chair of Governors and a representative from the local authority
- Inspectors interviewed four groups of students across all year groups and also spoke to students during lesson observations about their learning and progress. Inspectors also observed student behaviour at break, lunchtimes and between lessons.
- Students' workbooks were examined by inspectors
- Inspectors examined a range of school documentation including: school plans for improvement, the school's self-evaluation and monitoring records. In addition, inspectors also scrutinised attendance and behaviour logs, assessment data, governor meeting minutes, the headteacher's reports, the safeguarding register and documents relating to teacher performance management.
- Inspectors reviewed the 16 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire Parent View and spoke with one parent at his request. They also considered the views expressed in 24 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Zarina Connolly, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jean Samuel

Additional Inspector

Patrick Cook

Additional Inspector

Richard Masterton

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- Big Wood School is a smaller than the average secondary school.
- The majority of students are of White British origin and approximately one fifth of students are from minority ethnic groups. Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is just below the national average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school makes use of an alternative curriculum provision off-site for a very small number of students at Equip, a local resource.
- The school has developed strong links with an outstanding school, which is also a teaching school. Some teachers have received various training, including improving teacher programmes (ITP) and outstanding teacher programmes (OTP).
- The headteacher has been in post since September 2012.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that rapid progress is made by all students by:
 - ensuring that teachers have high expectations of students and set challenging targets for the progress they should make in the short and medium term in both English and mathematics
 - planning learning activities that stretch and challenge the most-able students, particularly in languages and mathematics
 - providing effective support and challenge for students with special educational needs and those who are at risk of underachieving
 - ensuring that marking and feedback to students is meaningful and consistent so that it allows students to reflect on the quality of their work and act upon areas for development.
- Further improve work already undertaken to improve the attendance of students in all year groups, but particularly the older students and those at risk of underachieving, so that attendance is at least in line with national averages.
- Improve the quality of leadership at all levels by:
 - setting targets for students which are challenging and clearly understood by both staff and students, and which will lead to at least good progress
 - ensuring that subject leaders, especially of English, foreign languages, mathematics and science, carry out their monitoring activities frequently and effectively so that school policies are consistently applied and underperformance is addressed quickly
 - further develop support plans which attend to the needs of students whose circumstances make them vulnerable, so that they can all achieve their potential and make good progress
 - ensuring that governors improve their skills in challenging school leaders and checking for themselves the effectiveness of improvement plans.

Ofsted recommends that an external review of governance is undertaken.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Students enter the school with standards in English and mathematics well below national averages. On average, they start secondary school approximately 1 year behind their peers nationally.
- By the time they leave the school, the standards students achieve in GCSE English and mathematics are low compared to other students nationally. On average, they leave school approximately two years behind in these subjects.
- The percentage of students achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and mathematics has significantly declined since the last inspection
- The progress that students make from their different starting points in both English and mathematics is well below national expectations; there is little sign of improvement.
- Student achievement in other key subjects such as foreign languages, humanities and science are well below the standards that could be reasonably expected of them given their starting points. Achievement in some vocational subjects has been particularly disappointing, with some courses achieving no A*-C equivalent passes. The leadership team has addressed this and is now only providing vocational courses which have shown a track record of success.
- Students known to be eligible for the pupil premium make considerably less progress in English and mathematics compared with other students in the school. The funding has been used to provide a range of support including additional teaching assistant time and individual tuition. Provisional results for 2013 suggest the gap in attainment between these students and others in mathematics was equivalent to approximately one and half grades at GCSE; in English this gap is equivalent to just over 1 a grade at GCSE. These gaps are much larger than those seen nationally because the pupil premium funds have not been used effectively.
- In 2013, the progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs was inadequate in English and mathematics; they do not achieve the number of qualifications that they should. These students are supported well by specialist staff outside the classroom but their subject teachers do not plan tasks which will ensure good progress in lessons.
- Students eligible for catch-up funding in Year 7 make good progress in English by the end of the year as a result of the specific guidance they receive and the strategies used by teachers to support their learning. Students' reading ages have improved. Strategies to improve progress in mathematics are less successful.
- Students were entered early for their mathematics examinations; this adversely affected many groups of students' final grade, especially the most able, because there was insufficient incentive for them to improve their grade. Leaders have stopped this policy from this year.
- The alternative provision off-site was wholly ineffective because outcomes were woefully inadequate last year. From this year onwards only a very small number of students take part. Current progress reports suggest that the success and effectiveness of this provision is still variable; it is being closely monitored by school leaders.
- The targets set for students are not always challenging. As a result, students, especially those

who have very low or very high starting points and those at risk of underachieving, have not been expected to make the progress they should; this has contributed to overall underachievement for student groups.

- In 2013, the predictions of subject teachers about how students would perform in their final examinations were inaccurate; predictions were approximately 10% higher than actual outcomes. Consequently, underachievement was not identified and support was not deployed appropriately.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- The quality of teaching is inadequate because too few students make the progress they should over time, especially in key subjects. Overall, the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is too low to bring about rapid progress and reverse the legacy of underachievement. Some students say that they feel 'let down' by the school because of the disruption to their learning as a result of weak teaching in, for example, foreign languages.
- Where teaching requires improvement or is inadequate there is insufficient pace or challenge; learning activities are the same for all students and tasks set are too easy for the most able or too hard for the least able. Consequently, these students do not reach their potential.
- The students' workbooks confirm that the progress of many students is too slow in a range of subjects, especially for the most and least able. For these students there was little evidence that learning tasks were carefully planned to meet the needs of different abilities. In the workbooks of students at risk of underachievement, the quality of presentation was often scrappy and the quantity of work was modest; this indicates low aspirations from both teacher and student.
- The quality of marking and feedback is variable across subjects and teachers. Some older students report that, 'it depends on the teacher', whether their work is marked at all. Marking by teachers range in quality from cursory, using ticks and simple comments, to more detailed comments, helping students to make progress. In the vast majority of student workbooks, however, there is little or no opportunity given for students to act upon areas for development. The best and most consistent practice is in English.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs benefit from specifically tailored small-group and one-to-one teaching sessions from skilled practitioners. However, the progress these students make as a result of whole-class teaching is much less than that made by other students and is too dependent on the variable quality of the support they get from their teacher and other adults. In the best practice observed, teaching assistants planned the learning in advance with the main teacher and used good questions to help students to work out solutions for themselves. Where this support is less successful, the additional adults in the classroom do too much of the work for students, giving a false impression to both the class teacher and student about learning gains.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are not developed consistently across all subjects, despite the professional training teachers received last year. However, strategies to improve reading skills for younger students by the special educational needs department, using small group support, are successful.
- Teachers generally promote good attitudes to learning and a purposeful and calm atmosphere in lessons. Where teachers encounter low-level disruption, they use a range of strategies to diffuse problems and refocus learners successfully.

- Inspectors observed pockets of good quality teaching in English, humanities and science but practice is still too variable in quality across subject areas. In successful lessons, good quality teaching is characterised by carefully planned activities to meet the needs of different abilities, inspirational teaching and skilful questioning to promote understanding. Many teachers have benefited from recent strengthening of leadership in some subject areas and focussed teacher training and development activities.
- The quality of teaching in the physical education department is good. Health and physical well-being amongst students is promoted well by teachers.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' conduct in lessons and around the school site is generally polite and cooperative. Younger students report that lessons are only disrupted by a small minority of students and say that teachers are 'firm but fair'. Older students, however, say that this type of behaviour is more frequent. Behaviour logs confirm this; whilst there has been an improvement in the number of incidents recorded in lessons over time, attitudes to learning in Years 10 and 11 are still not always good.
- School leaders have been successful in reducing the number of exclusions both temporary and permanent. The proportion of students excluded from school now compares favourably to national averages. This is because leaders have created facilities in school to support student engagement, such as an inclusion base. Students say that they have found the support they get very helpful.
- Attendance is low and has been for some time, although recent logs show an improvement especially for younger students. Attendance in the upper years is still below national averages, although there are fewer persistently absent students. There are too many students at risk of underachieving who do not attend school; leaders are addressing this issue by using pupil premium funding to support students and families and there have been some early successes.
- Students report that bullying does occur and they know how to report it when it happens. They are also confident that adults will deal with these problems well. They feel safe in the school. They are fully aware of the different types of bullying, including racist, homophobic and on-line bullying. They have been provided with good guidance on how to remain safe on the internet.

The leadership and management

are inadequate

- Leaders and managers have not demonstrated a sustained track record of improvement. Standards have declined.
- Leadership in mathematics, English and languages has been weak over time. Recent management restructuring by the headteacher and new appointments to subject leadership positions provide the school with opportunities to drive important improvements in standards but it is too early to see if these changes will improve student performance in examinations.
- School leaders do not have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Records show that leaders are over-generous in their evaluation of performance. The progress which they expect students to make is not ambitious enough, especially in Years 7 to 9. Consequently interim assessment data portrays a more positive view of progress than it actually is and underachievement is not spotted early enough.

- The headteacher has rightly focussed all training and development activities on improving the quality of teaching and used external support well to further secure improvements. Teaching amongst some teachers has improved. However, the quality is still too variable across subject areas to address the legacy of underachievement.
- Whole-school policies, such as marking and feedback and literacy, are not applied consistently because subject leaders and others are not carrying out their monitoring role effectively.
- The quality of leadership of teaching and learning is beginning to improve. Performance management systems set out clear expectations for teachers and the national Teacher Standards are used to make judgements about the quality of teaching. However, action was not taken quick enough to tackle teacher underperformance which resulted in too many students underachieving last year.
- Leadership of the special educational needs department has been strengthened recently. Specific support has been provided for those at risk of underachieving but it is too early to see the impact on student progress.
- In her first year in post, the headteacher has been strict about the criteria used to reward teachers with pay increases through the performance management process. When teachers do not reach required standards they are not automatically promoted to the next level of pay.
- School leaders have taken action to improve the range and quality of subjects they put on offer to students in years 10 and 11. For example, some off-site vocational and BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) courses have been withdrawn due to persistent poor student performance. Good impartial advice and guidance for students making choices about higher and further education, employment and training is provided by Nottingham Trent and Nottingham University Nottingham Futures and local colleges.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements.
- Assemblies and tutor time are used to promote students' spiritual, moral and cultural development but there is little evidence of these issues being developed in subject teaching. There is no clear or developed whole-school approach to drive this dimension of student education.
- The local authority has provided limited support to the school. Officers have supported the school's partnership with a local outstanding school and have provided training for governors to help them understand how to interpret school performance data. Further support and regular monitoring is planned for this year.
- The school should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers without the consent of the monitoring HMI.

■ **The governance of the school:**

The leadership of the governing body has only relatively recently become stable. The recently appointed Chair of Governors has begun to seek support to improve governance following the disappointing examination results in the summer. For example, a skills' audit has already been carried out. Governors understand some of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, as a result of reports they receive from the headteacher. Although the questions they ask are challenging, they have not yet used effective ways to check the information they have

received for themselves. The way the school uses government funding, such as the Catch-up funding and the Pupil Premium is well understood by governors; they are not, however, as clear about the impact this spending has had on outcomes for students. Governors approve school development plans but their role in driving improvement is not clear or developed. The Chair of Governors and headteacher recognise this and welcome an opportunity for an external review of governance to strengthen the support and challenge governors can provide for leadership.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122844
Local authority	Nottingham
Inspection number	427799

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	747
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Jan Sensier
Headteacher	Mrs Andrea Healey
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2012
Telephone number	0115 9539323
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