

Wolgarston High School

Cannock Road, Penkridge, Stafford, ST19 5RX

Inspection dates 29–30 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Standards have risen sharply since the previous inspection and the rates of progress of all groups of students have strongly improved, now comparing favourably to national levels. Students enjoy their learning and are keen to do well.
- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Standards are above average, because teaching is of a consistently high quality. Sixth form students take a leading role in school life, particularly in supporting younger ones.
- The quality of teaching has improved dramatically since the previous inspection and nearly all is now good or better. Teachers have high expectations of their students, who say that teachers' good subject knowledge makes lessons interesting and enjoyable.
- Behaviour in lessons and around school is good and often exemplary. The school has a calm and harmonious atmosphere, and students are polite and courteous.
- Students say that the school keeps them very safe and that they greatly value the support and care provided by the family support team.
- The headteacher has been relentless in driving improvement since the previous inspection. He has surrounded himself with a strong senior team and is very well supported by the outstanding governing body. By ensuring that all staff and students consistently strive for 100% in all they do, the quality of teaching and learning has risen strongly. The school shows an outstanding capacity to improve further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- When students are taught in mixed-ability classes, very occasionally teachers do not fully challenge those of highest ability or sufficiently support those of lowest ability so that they find the work too easy or too difficult.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent, so that students do not always have a clear enough understanding of how to improve their work.
- Although the gap in performance between students for whom the school receives additional funding and others is closing strongly, strategies to close the gap at a faster rate are not securely embedded in mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 lessons, eight of which were jointly observed with one of the school’s senior leaders. They also made a number of short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body, the local authority’s improvement partner and staff, including subject leaders.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at policies, the school’s self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring records, information about students’ progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students’ work.
- The views of 85 parents and carers who responded to Ofsted’s questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account. In addition, a letter from a parent was considered. Inspectors also looked at the 42 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
David Wolfson	Additional Inspector
Douglas Folan	Additional Inspector
Martin Spoor	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Students enter at the start of Year 9.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is low, while the proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is low and almost none speaks English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, is below the national average.
- Five students attend a variety of full- and part-time alternative courses provided at Nova Training and the South Staffordshire College Rodbaston Campus.
- The school meets the current government floor standards for secondary schools, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been many staffing changes, including in senior and subject leadership.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Use existing outstanding practice to move more good teaching to outstanding and ensure that all teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - making sure that all teachers fully stretch those of highest ability and support those of lowest ability, particularly in mixed-ability groups, so that work is at the right level of difficulty in order for them to achieve well
 - improving the consistency of marking so that all students have a clear understanding of how to develop their work and are able to demonstrate to their teachers that they have understood the advice given.
- Fully embed the improvements made in mathematics, so that the gap in attainment and rates of progress between those for whom the school receives pupil premium funding and their peers continues to close at a fast pace.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students typically enter the school in Year 9 having achieved below-average standards in reading, writing, communication and mathematics by the end of Key Stage 2. The proportion of students in Year 11 gaining five good GCSE passes, including English and mathematics, after three years in the school has risen strongly since the previous inspection. In 2013, this proportion was equal to the national average, while their average points score, including in English and mathematics, was above average. The school's robust assessments indicate that the current Year 11 cohort is on track to improve on the previous year's results and to gain a larger proportion of the highest grades.
- In 2013, the proportion of students making expected rates of progress compared well to national figures in English and mathematics, while the proportion making more than expected progress exceeded national levels. Lesson observations during the inspection confirm that students enjoy their learning and are making good progress in all year groups and all subjects, including in modern foreign languages where results were previously below average. This is because the new leader of the department is ensuring that students can now build on their studies in French started at middle school rather than changing to a new language, Spanish, in Year 9. The few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who speak English as an additional language are making similar rates of progress.
- Students achieve very well in the sixth form. Rates of progress from their starting points are significantly above average in both academic and vocational courses. Results over the past three years show that attainment at A level has risen sharply and, in 2013, nearly a quarter of students gained the highest grades. This was also the case at AS level. BTEC students also achieved well, particularly in sport. GCSE English and mathematics are compulsory additional courses for any students who failed to achieve a grade C or above in Year 11. The vast majority of students are successful in achieving this.
- A strong focus on sixth form students' ability to develop independent study skills prepares them well for their next steps. All students have moved on to further or higher education or employment over recent years. Current university applications show that the proportion of students gaining university places is set to increase further by the end of 2014. Retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are high because students are well matched to their courses, are taught very well and show great enjoyment of, and commitment to, their studies.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported and their progress is rigorously tracked. Leaders have ensured that the quality of this support has improved, and this is valued by parents. As a result, they are currently making similarly good progress to that of their classmates. Rather than being supported by teaching assistants in lessons, they benefit from being taught in small groups in English and mathematics so that their teachers can provide a high level of subject-specific individual support. This raises their self-confidence by providing opportunities for them to build their understanding step by step with a strong focus on how to succeed in examinations.
- Well-established strategies are in place to help to accelerate students' reading. A variety of catch-up courses and one-to-one tuition are provided for the weakest readers, establishing a systematic approach and providing effective support throughout Year 9 and beyond. This results in these students making good progress in reading. Students show a love of reading, making good use of the library. They are frequently encouraged to read out loud across all subjects, including in the sixth form. Teachers promote students' technical vocabulary in each subject and

have high expectations that these words will be used and understood.

- The school ensures that the highest-attaining students achieve their potential in English and mathematics by setting classes by ability. The students in the large top sets are all expected to achieve an A or A* grade and are taught by teachers with expert subject knowledge, who provide a very high level of challenge. Students eligible for additional pupil premium funding in these groups are well known and supported by their teachers, enabling them to achieve as well as their classmates.
- The majority of students are entered for GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 11. Highest-attaining students are entered in the winter of Year 11, enabling them to move on to the further mathematics course.
- Pupil premium funding is used appropriately on a wide range of strategies that focus on promoting study skills and providing the financial support to ensure that those facing challenging circumstances are fully included. It is currently providing additional teachers in mathematics and English to enable small-group tuition, and to promote the attendance rates of this group of students.
- The attainment of students for whom the school receives pupil premium funding has been below that achieved by this group nationally in English and mathematics, although this gap is now closing rapidly. In 2013, the average GCSE grade of these students was a grade behind their classmates in English, while in mathematics it was a grade and a half. However, from 2012 to 2013 the gap in the proportion of these students who gained five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics halved. The gap in the proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress in English also dramatically closed from 2012 to 2013 as a result of well-focused support, although less so in mathematics. The school's current data for Years 9 to 11 show that the gap is rapidly closing for all ability levels, and well-focused strategies are now in place to increase this rate more rapidly in mathematics.
- The very few students following alternative courses achieve well as a result of the well-matched support and care they receive.
- Students enjoy their learning and are keen to do well. They know the school has high expectations of them and rise to the challenge of striving for 100% in all they do. They are aware that, if they do not meet these high expectations, they will be expected to repeat their work until they achieve this goal.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Almost all teaching observed during the inspection was good, and over a quarter was outstanding. Leaders' rigorous checking on the quality of teaching shows that this is typically the case. There remains, however, a very small proportion of teaching that still requires improvement.
- Sixth form students told inspectors that all teaching they receive is outstanding and spoke of how their teachers inspire them. Observations confirmed this high-quality teaching. In an English lesson in Year 13, students were observed making rapid progress as a result of well-planned tasks that presented a very high level of challenge. The teacher's expert subject knowledge ensured that students built their understanding and skills during the lesson, and his insistence on a fast pace of response was presented in a way that was engaging and exciting so that the students were totally engrossed. This is also typical of vocational courses where teachers promote a high level of independence. For example, in business studies, teachers enable

students to experience a real-life enterprise programme for which they have designed and marketed a computer tablet stand. Inspectors observed students working independently with confidence and displaying a high level of business understanding.

- In all subjects across the school, teachers use questioning skilfully to challenge students to think deeply about their learning. If an answer is not immediately forthcoming, the question is passed around the class so that other students can contribute their ideas. This ranges from 'phone a friend' to creating a debate that challenges students to justify and explain their opinions.
- Teachers in all subjects promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well, by providing opportunities for reflection on moral issues and for developing teamwork. In all lessons, there is strong emphasis on group work and students are frequently encouraged to discuss their learning and to assess each other's work.
- Leaders are establishing very effective assessment practice across the school. In many lessons observed, teachers outlined what needed to be done to achieve a high grade and students are used to using the examination assessment criteria to assess their own and each other's work. There is, however, some inconsistency in the marking of written work and not all teachers provide clear enough advice for students about how to further improve their work. Some opportunities are also missed to enable students to follow up this advice by applying it and showing their teachers that they have understood.
- A small minority of teachers do not plan tasks that provide a sufficient variety of challenge or support to match the wide range of abilities in their classes. This particularly applies to subjects that are taught in mixed-ability classes. This results in these students occasionally finding the work too easy or too difficult.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. In lessons, their behaviour is exemplary. When questioned by inspectors it was quickly evident that they had soaked up the information they had been given. They are always eager to start a new task or to answer questions.
- Around the school there is an atmosphere of calm. Students are polite and courteous, show respect for their teachers and for each other and present themselves smartly, showing pride in their uniform. They are punctual to lessons which often start before the bell in the morning.
- Students told inspectors that teachers manage behaviour consistently, and all showed understanding of the clear warning cards that are used progressively should anyone step out of line.
- Students across the school enjoy taking responsible roles, for example, as members of the student council. Sixth form students take an active part in school life, providing support for reading and in a variety of subjects, leading assemblies and other activities, enabling them to develop leadership skills.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding, and parents and staff agree. Key to this is the family and student support service. This is highly visible on entry to the school and is welcoming so that students and their families experiencing challenging circumstances have a place where they can receive care, support and guidance. This is highly valued by students.

- Students have a good understanding of the different forms that bullying can take, including a detailed understanding of what to do if they experience cyber-bullying. They say that incidents of bullying are rare and that adults support them well. Rapid action is taken to address homophobic name-calling, and this was part of the focus of 'Diversity Week' that was taking place during the inspection. This also promoted respect for other cultures and religions.
- Attendance rates are high and persistent absence is low.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher leads by example. Since the previous inspection, he has been relentless in his drive for improvement. He is self-critical and encourages others to be so and strive for 100%. This mantra covers every aspect of the school's work and highlights leaders' extremely high expectations of both staff and students.
- He has formed a new and very effective senior team who have been instrumental in ensuring that progress of all groups of students is meticulously tracked and analysed so that underachievement can be quickly addressed and equal opportunity can be ensured.
- Self-evaluation is detailed and focuses strongly on areas for improvement which have been appropriately focused on the issues raised by the previous inspection, which have all been rigorously and effectively addressed.
- The quality of teaching has been rigorously monitored, support and training provided and firm action taken if teachers have not met high standards. Teachers are closely held to account for the progress made by their students, and salary increases only awarded if progress targets are met. There has been a particularly strong focus on raising the quality of teaching in mathematics and modern foreign languages, and new leaders have been appointed for both faculties. This has resulted in teaching and learning in these subjects improving dramatically and achievement rising. The quality of teaching has strongly improved across the school.
- Subject leaders value the support provided by their line managers to enable them to build their leadership capacity. These middle leaders share in the monitoring of teaching and have clear action plans in place to drive improvement.
- The school is fully committed to enabling students to gain the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and is constantly striving to ensure that students are successful in all of the subjects required for this qualification, particularly in languages. It also includes a small number of vocational courses. The sixth form curriculum is particularly strong in enabling students to follow a range of academic and vocational courses that meet their interests and aspirations. These include photography and sport. Students enjoy the range of clubs and trips that enrich their learning and value the range of guidance and advice on their next steps, including on their choice of sixth form courses.
- The school works well to engage parents, including through the parents forum and frequent questionnaires to canvass their views. The family and student support team works tirelessly to provide support for those facing challenging circumstances.
- The sixth form is extremely well led and managed. The continuous drive for excellence from all staff is underpinned by detailed analysis of progress, making the best use of a wide range of useful and appropriate data.

- All statutory and other safeguarding requirements are met in full.

- The local authority gives light-touch support to the school's leaders and has a good understanding of this rapidly improving school.

- **The governance of the school:**
 - The outstanding governing body has been instrumental in driving for improvement since the previous inspection. It has done this by providing its support and expressing its full confidence in the leadership of the headteacher and enabling him to form an effective senior team. Governors have an extremely good understanding of issues facing the school, including the impact of falling rolls and are ensuring that the school retains a high-quality provision. They have a good understanding of performance data and can compare the school's performance with that of schools nationally. Governors' scrutiny committees require subject leaders to be extensively challenged as to how they will raise achievement and the quality of teaching and, as a result, build their capacity as middle leaders. Governors check carefully that pupil premium funding is used effectively and challenge the school's leaders to ensure that it is having sufficient impact on the achievement of this group.

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	124415
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	429604

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	761
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Howard Stemp
Headteacher	Philip Tapp
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2012
Telephone number	01785 788400
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