

Blythe Bridge High School

Cheadle Road, Blythe Bridge, Stoke-on-Trent, ST11 9PW

Inspection dates 4–5 March 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement in English in the last two years has been well below national averages.
- The achievement of boys, students who receive additional funding and some who have a disability or special educational needs is particularly weak in English.
- Achievement in other core subjects has not been better than average.
- There is some inadequate teaching, and too little is good enough to improve student progress rapidly.
- Students are sometimes given work that is too easy or hard, so that they are unable to make good progress.
- Teachers' checks on students' progress in lessons are not fully effective and do not engage the interest of every individual.
- Marking is inconsistent across the school. Students sometimes receive limited feedback on how they are doing or how to improve.
- Students' behaviour requires improvement because some lessons are interrupted by low-level misbehaviour and inattention. Teachers do not always apply school policy effectively.
- Leaders and managers at all levels do not include enough measurable targets in their planning. This has meant limited progress on the areas identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders' checks on teaching do not take full account of the rates of progress made by students. Teachers are not held fully accountable for the progress of students in the classes taught.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has a distinctive character that fosters leadership, creativity, innovation and shared values and responsibility.
- The specialist areas of music and sports, and extensive broader opportunities are valued by students, staff and parents.
- The sixth form is good, providing well for students' academic, leadership and wider development.
- Some improvements have been seen in recent results, and current school data indicate that these improvements will be sustained.
- The arrangements made to keep students safe and for their well-being are good. They feel safe at school and report that bullying is rare and dealt with well by adults.
- The school is a friendly, orderly community. Students are polite, helpful and well-mannered.

■ Achievement in modern languages is good and improving.

■ Leaders and managers have identified and are improving some weaker areas of performance.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 52 lessons or part lessons, six of these jointly with senior leaders and managers. Shorter visits were made in order to get a broader indication of teaching and learning across the school. Inspectors also made shorter visits to some classrooms to look at group-support sessions and morning tutor groups.
- The team visited many different areas of the school and the site during lessons and at break times.
- Meetings were held with three different groups of students, members of the governing body, senior staff, subject and pastoral leaders, as well as a local authority representative.
- The inspection team examined a range of school documentation, including improvement plans and policies, lesson plans, records of lesson monitoring and checks on students' work, and the minutes of meetings, including those of the governing body. Inspectors examined a range of data, both those available to the public and those used by the school to monitor current rates of students' progress and attendance.
- The 14 responses made to the online questionnaire Parent View by the end of the inspection were considered, along with parental surveys conducted by the school.

Inspection team

David Martin, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Roger Whittall	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Needham	Additional Inspector
Helen Booth	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized Music Foundation Trust school and Sports College. The school is a provider of teacher training as well as delivering courses for practising teachers.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is lower than average. This is extra government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority, and students with a parent in the armed forces.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The school meets government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress in secondary schools.
- Fifteen students currently study for part of their education in alternative provision off site at Stoke College.
- The school holds a large number of awards. These include: Arts Mark; Eco School; International School; UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools; NSCL and OLEVI accredited facilitators.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently good or better by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching without delay
 - planning work that is challenging, but not too easy or difficult for students of different abilities
 - ensuring that methods to ascertain how well students understand their work, such as questioning, are more consistently used to engage all students and accelerate their progress
 - applying the school policy on marking more rigorously in all subjects, so that students receive at least good feedback on how they are doing, and know how to improve their work as a result
 - ensuring that school policy on behaviour management is applied more consistently, so that low-level disruption is dealt with swiftly and learning time is not lost.
- Improve students' achievement to good or better, particularly in English, by:
 - ensuring that boys' progress accelerates to close the gap currently evident between their performance and that of others
 - ensuring that pupil premium funding is carefully targeted to accelerate the progress of eligible students, so that the gap currently evident between their attainment and that of others closes
 - ensuring that all disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve well.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, by:
 - reviewing school improvement planning so that it has clear, measurable targets
 - making sure that checks made by the school of the quality of teaching take full account of the progress made by students over time
 - ensuring that the teachers are held to account for the progress of their students
 - making sure that the improvements required in teaching are checked regularly, ensuring much greater consistency across and within subjects
 - checking rigorously that the gaps currently evident between the different groups of students close more swiftly, particularly in English.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Students attain standards that are broadly average by the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. From their individual starting points, which are often above average, this indicates progress that requires improvement, overall.
- Attainment varies. In students' 'best eight subjects', it is above average. However, in the important measure of '5 A*–C subjects including English and mathematics', it was well below average in 2012, largely due to poor results in English. Attainment recovered to the national average in 2013.
- In English, a smaller proportion of students make and exceed the levels of progress most students in the country make. Students' progress in science is also below these levels at GCSE, although around a third of students attain better than average results in vocational courses in science.
- Students were entered early for GCSE mathematics in the winter of Year 11 in 2013, but there is no indication that this has a negative impact on their overall results.
- Disabled students or those with special educational needs make similar progress overall to other students. Although some of those receiving additional support performed less well than others, in 2013, this is not a pattern over time or in current school data.
- Students supported by pupil premium funding in 2013 were more than a whole GCSE grade behind other students in the school by the end of Year 11. A much smaller proportion of these students made adequate progress, particularly in English. The gaps in attainment for students eligible for the pupil premium closed a little in mathematics in 2013, but widened in English, and are not closing quickly enough over time. School assessment information for older students at the school indicates that these gaps are now closing and that progress in English is projected to improve strongly in 2014.
- Additional 'catch up' funding in Year 7 is helping a relatively small proportion of students in the school to improve their reading skills quickly. This is ensuring that poor literacy skills are not holding back students' achievements.
- The most able students are making similar progress to other students in the school, currently. However, a smaller proportion reached higher grades in some subjects than might be expected, given their starting points, in 2013.
- Most students' eagerness and enthusiasm for learning vary according to the quality of the teaching they receive and this makes the same varied impact on their progress.
- There is a trend of improvement in students' attainment and progress in the sixth form, particularly at A level, so that sixth form achievement is good overall. All students attained an A*–E grade in 2013 and all students moved successfully into higher education, training or employment.
- Attainment has improved strongly in modern languages, which is now well above national averages with high numbers of entries. The school is collaborating with a local university to offer staff and students high-quality learning opportunities.

The quality of teaching**requires improvement**

- Although the school judges teaching to be good, the range of evidence does not support this view. From written work over a number of months, checks of data, and observations of work in class, teaching in a number of subjects requires improvement, and there is some inadequate teaching.
- Planning is not consistently good. Students reported finding work too easy. Some Year 7 students report repeating work covered in their primary school. In other lessons, students reported that they found the work far too hard or that they didn't understand what they were expected to do.
- The challenge provided in some lessons is not strong enough to motivate and engage students. This too often results in inattention and off-task chatter or minor misbehaviour. As a result, learning time is lost and the progress made is weak.
- The methods used by teachers to ascertain how well students understand what they are learning and when they are ready to move on are not consistently effective. For instance, teachers' questioning skills were highlighted as a weakness at the previous inspection and remain variable, rarely engaging all students in the class.
- The school has recently revised its marking policy, having recognised inconsistency across the school. Students too often do not have detailed feedback on their work, or clear help or opportunity to improve it.
- The school policies for managing behaviour and rewarding success are inconsistently applied and this is why low-level disruption continues to reduce the impact of teaching. It is not dealt with quickly or effectively enough by some teachers.
- The weak teaching evident from the range of evidence in students' work, in the school's monitoring records and from observations, is balanced by evidence of some good and outstanding teaching. In this, teachers choose just the right methods to ensure the particular students they are teaching make the best progress of which they are capable.
- Strengths in most of the teaching are good subject knowledge, and positive relationships between students when working together, and between students and teachers. Much of the teaching in the sixth form is good. Here, staff check and review students' learning thoroughly, providing challenging targets which are well matched to students' individual study programmes. As a result, students develop good skills to learn independently.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**requires improvement**

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. In too many lessons there is low level disruption, such as calling out across the room or reluctance or delay in responding to teachers' instructions.
- The poor behaviour seen is directly related to the quality of teaching, the challenge and engagement offered to students in lessons, and the inconsistent manner in which school behaviour policies are applied. Some students told inspectors that their learning is occasionally interrupted by poor behaviour, and a few parents have concerns about behaviour, as expressed in the Parent View returns.

- Behaviour across the school is logged and more serious incidents are followed up effectively. However, there are instances when planned additional sanctions are not used in classrooms. In a few lessons, students do not have books, pencils or rulers when these are required, and teachers have to interrupt their teaching in order to provide them. Students do not always take enough care in neat presentation of their work.
- Students' conduct around school is sensible, calm and orderly. Students are polite, helpful and considerate. They engage willingly in the wide variety of activities on offer and have many opportunities to take on leadership roles, for example as sport leaders.
- Sixth form students want to learn and do their best. They willingly accept leadership responsibilities within and beyond the school. Because of this, the sixth form students play a full part in the life of the school, acting as good role models for younger students.
- Attendance has improved because the school has effective systems within the house system to check carefully on absence and to work with students and families where it is required. There are relatively few exclusions.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Safeguarding records and procedures are robust. All staff have up-to-date training, incident records are well maintained and individual incidents are investigated thoroughly. Students report that they feel safe.
- Students report that bullying is rare, and that they are confident that adults deal quickly and effectively with any concerns. They are aware of different forms of bullying and have regular reminders of e-safety, in using technology both at school and at home.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The school improvement plan has clear and appropriate priorities but does not have measurable targets and this limits its effectiveness. For this reason, a few aspects of teaching and learning still remain priorities after being identified at the previous inspection in 2011.
- The school has records of checks on teaching and now links these to students' progress. It is less clear how the quality of teaching within subjects is related to outcomes, particularly in subjects where progress over time has been too low. There has been limited checking of the quality of teaching by professionals from outside the school.
- Systems to monitor and reward the performance of teachers have been reviewed in the light of changed requirements. The targets seen during the inspection were not specific or individual enough to identify and develop the skills required to improve individual teachers' performance.
- There is some inadequate teaching but, while there is extensive training for all staff, it is not clear how poor performance that leaders already know about is being eradicated. The school recognises that teaching is inconsistent within subjects.
- The school has identified where the gaps in performance are. Current data suggest that these are now starting to close. Nevertheless, gaps have remained too wide for good progress to have been made since the previous inspection, particularly for students entitled to additional funding.
- Subject leaders have many opportunities for professional development and find senior leaders

and managers supportive. It is less clear how subject leaders have been made accountable for improving teaching and student progress over time.

- The local authority officer who supports the school has provided continuous contact. Because the school is not judged to be of concern to the local authority, support and intervention have not been a high priority. Support has been brokered for English, with some evidence of impact.
- The range of subjects taught is regularly reviewed and meets students' needs well, in the main school and sixth form. There is an extensive range of activities offered beyond the normal school day, with sports and music featuring strongly, favourably reflecting the school's specialism. The school's work has led to a number of awards, including for arts and sports leadership.
- The programme offered, along with 'form time' sessions and a well-structured house system, all have a very positive impact on the social, moral, cultural and spiritual development of each student. Students are encouraged to be creative and follow a wide range of interests.
- The headteacher plays a key role in fostering this positive school ethos. She is well supported by able senior leaders and managers who demonstrate the drive and passion that are moving the school forward. This is already being seen in improvements in sixth form performance and modern languages.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good. It ensures the courses offered are appropriate to students' career aspirations, challenges and stretches students' thinking, and ensures students' literacy and numeracy skills are sufficient to enable them to succeed.
- Current assessment data indicate that improvements in attainment and progress are on track for 2014, particularly in English. Progress in mathematics, however, is not thought by the school to be on track to improve on the 2013 results, which were broadly at national levels.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body has broad educational and wider expertise and an effective committee structure. Governors are aware of strengths and areas that need to be improved. There is evidence that they challenge leaders and managers about performance, for example in English.
- Governors receive reports on the quality of teaching and gather some first-hand evidence. They are not able to explain the school's evaluation of teaching as being good while there is weak performance over time in English, and for some groups of students.
- Governors have discussed and reviewed pupil premium funding. There has previously been some lack of clarity as to what funded activities are targeted specifically at eligible students and others that are of benefit to all students, and what the impact has been.
- Governors have reviewed systems for managing the performance and pay of teaching staff. Teachers do not progress through pay scales if they do not meet their targets.
- The level of challenge to underperforming staff has not been sufficient to eradicate inadequacy. However, governors have approved the promotion of some excellent practitioners to more senior posts and are committed to the development and improvement of teachers' skills through training.

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	124396
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	440610

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1025
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Melanie Salt
Headteacher	Shan Schanda
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2011
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