

Wheelers Lane Technology College

Wheelers Lane, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B13 0SF

Inspection dates 23–24 September 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Governors hold high ambitions for the boys of its local community. They have delivered that ambition of high academic standards and responsible young men who are outstandingly well equipped for further study and employment.
- Consistent appointments of highly effective senior leaders, including the head teacher have driven continuous improvement over time.
- Skilled management at all levels in the school allows effective tracking of individual students and rapid intervention and support of students where required.
- Good quality information about students' attainment and current progress is used by teachers to plan highly effective lessons. Teachers consistently address the individual learning needs of their students in all subjects.
- Boys attain higher standards than all students nationally. The progress they make put the school in the top 3% of schools nationally in 2013. In 2014, an even stronger picture is evident.
- Students eligible for additional funding achieve higher standards and make better progress than all students nationally; the lower attainment apparent in most schools for such students has been eliminated at Wheelers Lane.
- The school has noted that some more able students' who speak English as an additional language could be making even better progress because in some cases their answers lack precision.
- There is an outstanding programme of continuous staff training and development, which includes good collaborative working with local schools.
- The school curriculum is skilfully organised to provide a vast range of subjects and activities. It motivates the boys, sustains their strong commitment to learning and personal achievement, and provides them with unfettered access to future study and employment.
- There is outstanding teaching by well-trained teachers and external experts about the rights and responsibilities for students in modern democratic Britain. Teachers are vigilant for signs of radicalisation or abuse and take swift, expert action to resolve concerns.
- Boys are considerate and respectful of each other and of staff. They are exceptionally well-behaved and know how to keep themselves safe.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 36 lessons taught by different teachers. In 18 of these lessons, inspectors were joined by senior leaders. Inspectors also visited classrooms to scrutinise students' work.
- Inspectors held discussions with the head teacher, the local authority link officer, members of the governing body including the Chair, senior and middle leaders, and groups of students.
- Inspectors scrutinised governing body minutes, the school development plan and self-evaluation document, records on attendance, behaviour, health and safety, and recent school examination and assessment data.
- Inspectors took account of the 126 responses to Parent View, and the 86 responses to the Ofsted staff survey.

Inspection team

Brian Cartwright, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Brunt

Additional Inspector

Douglas Folan

Additional Inspector

Shahnaz Maqsood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This boy's school is smaller than most secondary schools.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of these students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average. No students have education, health and care plans.
- About two fifths of the students are eligible for the pupil premium, which is above average. This is additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and any with a parent in the armed services.
- English is not the first language for about a third of students. This is much higher than average.
- Over half the students are from minority heritage backgrounds. This is double the national proportion. About half of these are from Pakistani heritage.
- The school uses one alternative provision setting, called 'Envirohort'.
- The school is part of 'Birmingham South Area Network', a collaborative partnership of schools focussed on continuing professional development for teachers. It is part of a teaching school alliance.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure outstanding progress for all, especially for more able students whose first language is not English, by:
 - maximising the opportunities for students to give full, detailed verbal and written responses to the tasks they are assigned, in every subject

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Excellent leadership by the headteacher is mirrored throughout the various levels of responsibility in the school. Leaders share a common belief in the capabilities of the students, irrespective of students' background, and the sometimes low starting points. 'They can do better than that!' is the belief of this school. This leads to a consistently high level of expectation, encouragement and support for all learners, modelled by leaders and incorporated into the day to day positive working ethos of staff.
- Leaders are well on the way to planning for any change in assessment processes due to the removal of National Curriculum levels. Accurate data from regular assessment ensure that everyone, from students up to head teacher, knows how well each boy is progressing. The subsequent actions based on that information has been a key factor in driving up achievement. Boys know what they need to do lesson by lesson and teachers know what activities they need to assign to every learner lesson by lesson. Subject leaders know what interventions are necessary to support any student who might slip behind.
- This microscopic approach to tracking, and skilled planning of lessons in response, has been made possible through regular staff training and development. A strong coaching programme between staff, coupled to external experts and collaborations with other local schools has helped maintain high quality teaching, despite staff turnover. This school develops all grades of teachers very well, so they move out to promotions fairly regularly. The replacement staff are equally competent, thanks to good recruiting and then good professional development.
- Systems to monitor and reward the performance of staff are used fairly to ensure credit is given where it is due. Governors have good oversight of this process. Any weaknesses in teaching are quickly identified, and resolved through the continuing professional development programme.
- The school curriculum is exceptionally well designed to ensure wide subject choice, rich and varied cultural experiences. There are specific events to tackle contemporary concerns around student safety. The boys have a wide involvement on local and national charity work with plenty of opportunities for boys to participate in school life as they develop and understanding of democracy, and the need for tolerance of other views.
- To allow a wide choice of optional GCSE courses some subjects involve mixed-age classes of Year 9, 10 and 11 boys. Students take one option subject in one year, leading to three over three years. It does risk potentially lower grades for Year 9 students, compared to the grade they might attain if they were older. The school considers the motivational impact of offering choices that engage and interest students outweighs this risk. No dip in attainment is evident through this strategy.
- The wide range of extra-curricular sessions available every week considerably enhances students' learning and opportunities.
- The procedures to ensure students are kept safe and well, including child protection, are up to date. There are examples of effective actions taken as the result of deploying those procedures.
- All the questionnaires returned by staff were fully supportive of the school. A very large majority of the parents who responded to the online questionnaire are also very supportive of the school and would recommend it to others.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is outstanding. Over a sustained period of time, local community governors (some of who came to the college as students themselves) have appointed skilled professional school staff to deliver the long-standing vision of high standards and high aspirations for the children of the locality. The journey has taken many years, but persistence, clear vision and the ability to seek the best advice and support from local authority staff has brought about secure high achievement.
- Governors know the school well and are frequent visitors. They are well informed of school performance including the performance of teachers. Finance is well managed, with clear impact on the higher achievement for students eligible for the pupil premium, and Year 7 catch-up programmes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students is outstanding.
- School governors, and school staff are successful in setting out to teach students how to behave well, what their rights as young people are, and equally importantly, what their responsibilities are as members of the school community. Those rights and responsibilities are displayed prominently throughout the school.
- The importance of kindness, consideration and tolerance are embodied by teachers and copied by the boys. The programme of assemblies and of citizenship including health and sex education continually explain to students what they can expect as young people, and what they should do to ensure all people, of whatever background, enjoy the same high level of care. This includes concerns around radicalisation, e-safety, bullying in all its forms, racism, and substance misuse.
- All subjects incorporate specific opportunities to discuss morals and ethics, as well as the duties of citizens. Recently over 85% of the school community voted in a Birmingham youth parliament survey. There are many channels to involve students in the running of the school, from prefects and school council to lead learners and form representatives on council.
- The school curriculum successfully engages the interest of students. They can see the purpose of their learning, and that in turn inspires them to succeed. In the mixed-age lessons, students show outstanding collaboration and cooperation of students working alongside others from different ages and backgrounds.
- In lessons, students rapidly settle to work with no fuss. They arrive on time, well-presented and prepared for the lesson and expect to work hard and achieve well. They are not passive; teacher-student discussion is a key strength of learning, often initiated by students, and is continually taking place as lessons proceed, not just during whole class teaching sessions.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. It is based upon rigorous attention to the statutory requirements for health and safety and child protection, and on a culture of teaching the students themselves to share responsibility for their own and others safety.
- In between lessons and at breaks and lunchtimes students move amiably around the building. They can go anywhere, inside or out, irrespective of the weather because staff trust students to look after the buildings, as well as look out for one another. Discreet staff supervision means that there is always easy access to help.
- The site is meticulously maintained, by professional site management staff and by students' own attention to avoiding litter or causing damage. As a result the school is a delightful place to learn. A very high proportion of students come to school early and stay late, often to formal extra-curricular sessions but also just to stay and spend time with friends.

- Students, parents and staff all commend students' behaviour. Records show that any rare instances of poor behaviour are carefully logged so that all leaders and governors are aware of any trends or common patterns.
- Students say bullying, including racist or homophobic bullying is extremely rare. The students we spoke to could not give any examples themselves although they were confident that all staff would quickly help to resolve any problems. School records do show very occasional incidents, and show successful resolution of the problems.
- Attendance has recently risen to above average; Students arrive promptly to school and to lessons. The proportion of students who are persistently absent, which had been average, has improved and is now low.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The primary strength of teaching is the widespread and effective use of student progress data to inform lesson planning. Consequently there are no underperforming subjects or year groups.
- Activities successfully allow boys to make quick progress at an appropriate level of challenge. The needs of the most and least able are specifically identified and included in planning. Teaching is highly matched to provide individual challenge.
- Teachers and classroom assistants model a love of learning, through their enthusiasm, expertise and commitment to their subject. That passion is infectious, boys can see how much teachers enjoy their subject, and also what excellence in that subject looks like. There is no reticence amongst teachers or students for celebrating high academic and practical standards.
- Students' work shows teachers' very high degree of skill in dealing with the wide age range of the mixed-age classes. Observations and discussion show there are excellent working relations across the year groups, which in turn plays a key part in enhancing the personal development of the students.
- Homework supports learning well. For instance, a successful literacy focus in Key Stage 3 includes a series of homework-based projects called the 'Independent Learning Challenge'. Work was supported by the after-school clubs and included literature-based research and the writing of summary reports.
- Marking is thorough, consistent across all subjects and consistently gives the boys clear diagnostic feedback. It includes praise for work well done, and directs the boys to additional tasks that will further improve the work, followed by checks to confirm the improvement.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The average attainment of boys when they arrive in Year 7 is usually broadly average or just below. The attainment of boys at the end of Year 11 was above average in 2013, and even higher in 2014, in all measures and for all groups of students. For example 75% of the boys achieved 5 good GCSE grades in 2014 (up from 71% in 2013). Nationally about 55% of boys manage this standard.
- All groups of students, including those from minority heritage backgrounds, those with special educational needs or disabilities, and those from below, average and above average starting points make much better than average progress. Overall, this 'value added' measure puts the school in the top 3% of all schools nationally. Typically students attain at least one grade higher than would be expected from their individual starting points.
- The school noted that in 2013, the number of the very highest GCSE grades was lower than the national average. A programme of support and intervention for these more able boys has led to a doubling of the number of A/A* grades in 2014. A number of these grades were achieved by boys not specifically

identified by prior attainment as high-attainers, but who volunteered to join with the programme of support (called ASPIRE by the school). Some of these boys had quite low attainment on entry, so their progress to A and A* grades is spectacularly high.

- Analysis by the school shows that occasionally, more able boys for whom English is an additional language do not provide clear and detailed enough explanations using a wide vocabulary that are needed to gain the very highest grades.
- More able boys are consistently challenged with demanding activities, and the school is working hard to enhance their literacy skills so that the boys can more clearly communicate their higher-level understanding. This includes extended writing practice, insisting on full sentences in verbal responses, and a very good whole-school literacy policy that sets out common rules for spelling, punctuation and grammar. More needs to be done to widen opportunities for boys to write and talk at length, in all years and subjects.
- Boys eligible for the pupil premium achieve exceptionally well, gaining higher standards than all students nationally and making better progress than all students nationally. This group of students achieved well over half a grade better per GCSE than for all students nationally. In 2014, the in-school gap between this group and their classmates at Wheelers Lane closed, having been a third of a grade behind in English and two thirds of a grade behind in mathematics, in 2013.
- Disabled boys and those with special educational needs also make outstanding progress, across a full range of subjects. The school is particularly effective at tackling low literacy standards, with clear evidence of rapidly rising reading and writing skills in Year 7 and 8. This allows these boys, including some in the group that is disabled or with special educational needs, to quickly catch up and therefore successfully benefit from the secondary school curriculum. These boys develop confidence in their reading and are keen to show adults their new skills.

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	103501
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	448243

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	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	624
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Pearson
Headteacher	Carolyn Snaith
Date of previous school inspection	27 April 2010
Telephone number	0121 4442864
Email address	enquiry@wheelerslane.bham.sch.uk

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