

Meole Brace School Science College

Longden Road, Shrewsbury, SY3 9DW

Inspection dates 24–25 March 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- An ethos of welcome, care and support for every student is evident in all that this improving school does. The headteacher sets this expectation and all staff support it.
- Good senior and middle leadership have improved teaching and achievement in key areas, including mathematics.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and is supplemented with well-planned experiences and opportunities for students.
- The proportion of students who leave the school having achieved at least five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, is consistently above the national average.
- Teaching is good; teachers' strong subject knowledge and skilful questioning help students to deepen their understanding and make good progress.
- Students are polite, considerate to others and keen to do the very best they can. The school ensures they are kept safe at all times.
- The behaviour of students is of a consistently high standard, both in lessons and around the school.
- The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a significant strength of the school.
- Governors are passionate about their school and its mission to bring out the best in every student.
- The school does a great deal to help and support parents to overcome the many potential pitfalls of raising teenagers.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders' plans for improvement do not set out clear enough criteria against which the school's success can be measured, and this limits governors' ability to hold leaders to account.
- The gaps in achievement between disadvantaged and other students, although closing, are still too wide.
- Teachers do not always provide work that is accurately matched to the abilities of all the students they teach and the work they set, especially for the most able students, is not always challenging enough to hold their interest.
- The quality of marking and feedback is variable across the school and does not always help students to improve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 44 parts of lessons and looked at a wide range of the students’ exercise books and work. Twelve observations were carried out jointly with members of the school’s senior leadership team.
- Inspectors also observed students in assembly, between lessons and at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body, local authority representatives, senior and middle leaders, teachers and other school staff. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Inspectors considered the views of 150 parents via the Parent View online questionnaire, several letters written by parents and the school’s own parental questionnaire results. They also considered 41 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors held formal meetings with four different groups of students across the school.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised including: minutes of governing body meetings; the school’s self evaluation; the school and some subject improvement plans; safeguarding and child-protection records; school policies; and several case studies showing the school’s support for vulnerable students.

Inspection team

Alun Williams, Lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Deborah James	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Keith Whittlestone	Additional Inspector
Sally Smith	Additional Inspector
Suha Ahmad	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Meole Brace School Science College is a larger than average secondary school. It has grown by almost 200 students since its last inspection.
- Most students are of White British Heritage.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is larger than the national average.
- The proportion of students who are supported by the pupil premium (additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for those who are looked after by the local authority) is below the national average.
- A small number of students in Years 10 and 11 take vocational courses off site, provided by County Training and Geared Learning.
- The school meets the current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management further by ensuring that improvement plans include specific, measurable success criteria with clear timescales for action against which the school and individuals can be held to account.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that:
 - teachers consistently plan lessons that are well matched to students' abilities and aptitude, especially for the more able
 - marking is consistently good and helps students to be clear about what they need to do to improve.
- Accelerate the work that the school is already carrying out to improve the achievement of disadvantaged students by ensuring that:
 - class teachers take full responsibility for improving the achievement of disadvantaged students they teach so the school is less reliant on out of class intervention
 - further action is taken to improve the attendance of disadvantaged students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and senior leaders have a compelling vision for an inclusive, community school where each student is nurtured and supported to become the best they possibly can. Staff and parents share this vision and, as a result, a caring ethos permeates everything that the school does and creates an environment where young people behave well and are keen and able to succeed.
- Senior leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Development plans, written to address the weaknesses, are clear and concise but lack specific, measurable, time-related targets. This means that leaders and governors cannot always be clear as to how far their plans have been successful or not.
- Leaders correctly identified achievement of disadvantaged students and achievement in mathematics as the school's two most pressing improvement priorities and put in place a wide range of interventions to address both issues. They regularly collect and analyse assessment data and the data suggests that there is likely to be considerable improvement in students' achievement this year and that achievement in mathematics is now good. However, the school's approach to addressing the comparatively weak achievement of disadvantaged students has relied too much on additional intervention and not enough on the available every-day good teaching in classrooms.
- Leaders use the pupil premium funding effectively to support a number of interventions including a new 'Raise Leader', whose remit is the pastoral care of disadvantaged students. The school is seeing the impact from these interventions through improved attendance and a narrowing of achievement gaps between disadvantaged and other students.
- The school's middle leaders form a hard-working, committed and effective team who are strong advocates for their subjects. There are examples of rigorous self evaluation and well-targeted intervention, for example in English.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. It is broad and balanced at Key Stage 3 and provides a strong core and appropriate choices at Key Stage 4. As a result, students are able to study subjects that interest them. A carefully planned programme of personal, social and health education helps students explore issues of right and wrong, democracy, the rule of law and effectively prepares them for life in modern Britain.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also a strength of the school. A varied and rich programme of extra-curricular activities, including opportunities to join classes in Latin, an 'eco-club', the orchestra or the coding club, as well as cultural visits both in the UK and abroad supplements the taught curriculum. Teachers help students to understand different cultures in a number of ways including an annual multi-cultural week. Vibrant art work, completed by students, is displayed all around the school. The school works to promote equality of opportunity well and tackles any form of discrimination rigorously.
- The local authority knows the school well and provides appropriate levels of support. This has been effective recently in supporting the school's work in improving mathematics.
- Leaders carefully monitor the attendance, behaviour and progress of the small number of students who study off site for a part of the week. These checks, together with the students' genuine interest in their courses, lead to good achievement.
- Students are able to make informed choices about their next steps when they leave the school because of the school's well-planned programme of careers education, advice and guidance that runs from Year 7 through to Year 11. As a result, only two of the 259 students who left the school in 2014 failed to move on to a college course, an apprenticeship or to employment.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors fully share the headteacher’s vision for Meole Brace and they care deeply about their school and each student that belongs to it. They understand the school’s strengths and weaknesses because of the strong and open relationship that exists between them and senior leaders.
- Governors are involved in setting the school’s strategic direction; they play a part in drawing up the school development plan and they check its implementation. They are suitably aware of performance data and the quality of teaching in the school. As a result, they are increasingly confident of their ability to challenge leaders about the school’s performance. However, due to the school’s plans lacking specific and measurable targets, governors are not always able to hold senior leaders to account as accurately as they might.
- Governors have ensured that the school meets all statutory responsibilities including those for safeguarding and performance management. Their personnel committee oversees decisions about rewarding good teaching and checks how well the school’s leaders are managing underperformance. Financial management is robust.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They are pleasant, polite and courteous towards each other and towards adults around the school and during social times such as break and lunchtime. Students move around the school sensibly and considerately and this is no mean feat given the narrowness of many of the corridors.
- In lessons, students are usually attentive, cooperative and well behaved. In lessons that are carefully planned to provide interest and challenge, they are keen, enthusiastic and palpably eager to learn. In a minority of lessons where tasks lack challenge, students sometimes lose interest and become chatty.
- Students show an impressive level of care for their school environment. The building and grounds are free from graffiti. Students are careful not to drop litter even at the end of lunchtime.
- The number of fixed term exclusions has fallen and is well below national figures. Repeated exclusions are rare because students understand why they have been excluded and they learn from their mistakes.
- Attendance is improving and is now higher than the national average. However, the attendance of disadvantaged students is lower than that of other students in the school and also lower than the attendance of disadvantaged students nationally. Leaders are aware of this issue and improving the attendance of these students has been a major priority of the ‘Raise Leader’. The impact of these measures, as shown by students’ improved attendance, is already evident.
- The small number of students who receive part of their education away from the school site attend there regularly, behave well and make good progress.

Safety

- The school’s work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Students say that they feel safe in school and an overwhelming majority of parents who completed the on-line Parent View survey endorsed this view.
- Bullying is rare in the school and when it occurs, staff deal with it swiftly and appropriately.
- Parents are rightly very appreciative of the care and support that their children receive at Meole Brace. In addition to the overwhelmingly positive response to the Parent View questionnaire, several parents took the time to write to inspectors to express their particular appreciation. Typical was one letter praising the school’s staff for the ‘exceptional support that my daughter has received at a very difficult and emotional time’.

- Leaders have put in place a wide ranging and effective programme to support parents, including an e-safety evening attended by more than 300 parents, a briefing about self harming and a seven-week course on 'living with teenagers'.
- The curriculum successfully addresses personal safety issues such as e-safety and sexual health, but there is currently no clearly planned programme to address issues such as homophobic and racist bullying. Although students report that such bullying is very rare, they are aware of occasional inappropriate homophobic language.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good. This is evident in the good overall achievement of all students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs and the improving achievement of disadvantaged students.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use well in many subjects to craft interesting and engaging lessons that motivate students and encourage them to work hard. In one Year 9 drama lesson, students composed and performed a personal response to the Hillsborough tragedy showing an impressive depth of understanding and empathy for others.
- Leaders have recognised the need to improve the teaching of mathematics. As a result, teachers have implemented effective strategies and improvement is obvious both in mathematics lessons and in the school's data, indicating that achievement is now good.
- Leaders have given reading a high priority in the school through an array of additional interventions for students who need some extra help with their reading. This includes one-to-one reading lessons and peer reading schemes where older students help younger ones to read. Students who have had help then go on to help pupils in a local primary school with their reading. Because of this focus, students are making considerable progress in literacy.
- Students write at length and to a high standard in many subjects. This is particularly evident when teachers expect high quality writing from their class. In one Year 8 geography lesson, where a student had written a detailed essay, he commented that 'my teacher makes the subject so interesting that I could write and write'.
- Many teachers use questioning skilfully to tease out responses from students and to help deepen their understanding of their work. In a Year 11 geography revision lesson, the teacher used subtle and short prompts that encouraged students to expand on their original brief answers. This helped them to refine them into full and detailed responses ready to be committed to paper.
- In many lessons, teachers challenge students by planning work that interests them and is matched to their ability and aptitude. However, in some lessons teachers do not plan carefully enough and, as a result, tasks are not well matched to students' ability. When this is the case, some more-able students become bored as they complete simple tasks quickly and have to wait for others to catch up.
- In many subjects, books are thoroughly marked and teachers follow the school's marking policy by letting students know what they have done well and how they can improve. In the very best marking, it was evident that students have paid careful attention to this advice and improved their work. In other instances, marking was more likely to be a cursory tick or brief correction and very little that helped students understand how well they were doing.
- Teaching assistants provide effective additional support for disabled students and those with special educational needs.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school in Year 7 with attainment that is above average and in some year groups significantly so. The proportion who leave the school having achieved five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, is consistently above average and students' overall attainment was significantly above average in 2013 and 2014.
- Students attain impressive results in several subjects including geography, RE, modern foreign languages and drama. There are very few subjects where overall attainment is below national figures.
- The proportions of students making expected progress in English and mathematics are consistently in line with, or better than, national figures. The school's data for 2015 indicates that it is expecting considerable further improvement this year.
- From their different starting points, students who are disabled and who have special educational needs are making good progress. This because they receive good support in lessons and effective interventions outside of lesson time.
- Disadvantaged students are achieving less well than other students in the school and less well than other students nationally. The proportion of disadvantaged students gaining five GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, rose in 2014, considerably closing the gap from the previous year. The school's data suggests that this figure will improve again in 2015 and that the gap will close even further.
- In English, disadvantaged students are a little less than one GCSE grade behind others both in the school and nationally, but the gap is narrowing. In mathematics, the gap between disadvantaged students and others, both in school and nationally, had grown to nearly two GCSE grades in 2014, having been less than one grade in 2013. Assessments during this school year and students' work indicate that this gap will narrow considerably in 2015.
- Over time, the most-able students are making progress that is in line with that made by similar students nationally. They do particularly well in geography and in modern foreign languages and prior to 2014, in mathematics and science also. Their performance dipped in English in 2014 due to the early entry of the year group for GCSE English in the November of Year 11. Leaders do not intend to use early entry again. Four particularly able students took their mathematics GCSE at the end of Year 9 in 2014, all achieving A* grades. They are now in Year 10 and studying for their mathematics A level.
- The small number of students attending alternative provision achieve well on their vocational hairdressing and motor vehicle courses.

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	123573
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	447800

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	1211
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Joy Tetchill
Headteacher	Hilary Burke
Date of previous school inspection	30 May 2012
Telephone number	01743 235961
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