



Washwood Heath Technology College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103489
LEA Birmingham
Inspection number 276936
Inspection dates 8 March 2006 to 9 March 2006
Reporting inspector Ian Stuart AI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Burney Lane
School category	Community		Birmingham
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		West Midlands B8 2AS
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 7847272
Number on roll	1429	Fax number	0121 7899077
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Cecil K Knight
Date of previous inspection	11 March 2002	Headteacher	Mrs B Mabey

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Washwood Heath is a large comprehensive school with 160 students in the sixth form. It became a specialist Technology College in 1998 and regained that status in 2004. Students come from a range of circumstances but many are from areas of high social disadvantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. Most students are from minority ethnic heritages, the largest group being of Pakistani origin. The home language of most students is not English, but few are in the early stages of learning English. Over two thirds of the students are boys. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. For several years, the functions of the governing body have been undertaken by an interim executive board (IEB), appointed by the local education authority, but a shadow governing body is now working alongside the IEB. The present headteacher, who is the first permanent headteacher for five years, has been in post since September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The overall effectiveness of the school is inadequate at present because achievement and standards have declined to an exceptionally low level and the curriculum has not developed to meet the needs of all students. Improvement since the last inspection has been inadequate and the school is not giving value for money. Major improvements are now taking place which are beginning to have a positive impact on the school. This follows a very uncertain period without a permanent headteacher or governing body.

Under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, the school is demonstrating a good capacity to improve. She is clearly focused on raising achievement through a strong determination to tackle weaker areas of the school's work. She has united senior managers to form a strong team. Although there are inconsistencies in the quality of leadership given by curriculum leaders, which are being addressed, there is a clear sense of purpose and resolve amongst the whole staff to play their full part in the school's recovery. The school's evaluation of its past and present effectiveness is sharp and accurate. The school judged its overall effectiveness as satisfactory because of recent improvements and its potential to improve further. Although the inspection team has judged overall effectiveness still to be inadequate because the impact of what is happening now has yet to become clear, inspectors are in broad agreement with the school's evaluations, which give a firm foundation to its improvement plans. Considerable progress has been made in the last six months and there are clear indications of its future direction.

Students' personal development is a strength of the school, and there are good relationships within this multi-cultural community. Students enjoy coming to school and their attendance is very good. Opportunities for enrichment are good. Teaching is satisfactory and improving. The impact of better teaching is now reflected in better achievement, although as yet, there is relatively little good teaching.

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement and the curriculum.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education for its students. Although there are strengths in the sixth form, the school's overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the sixth form as good is too generous. Achievement of students of all backgrounds taking vocational courses is good because teaching is good and the courses are well matched to students' needs. Achievement for those taking AS and A level courses is satisfactory because the quality of teaching is more variable and the monitoring of students' progress is not good enough. Leadership and management of the sixth form are

satisfactory, and a notable strength is the supportive environment that encourages students' personal development and growing maturity.

What the school should do to improve further

Improve students' achievements significantly throughout the school by raising further students' expectations of what they are capable of doing. Ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all students more effectively by implementing the proposed changes that are being planned. Increase the amount of good teaching to enable students to make faster progress by continuing to help teachers to improve their teaching skills. Ensure consistently high quality of leadership amongst curriculum leaders by taking effective action to improve weaker areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are inadequate. The results of the national tests taken in Year 9 and the GCSE examinations in 2005 were exceptionally low. Students achieved far less well than expected in relation to their starting points, which were below average. Boys in general and Pakistani students did particularly poorly. Targets were modest, but, with the notable exception of English in Year 9, where standards have been rising, these were not met.

There is substantial evidence that achievement in all years is better now than the very low levels shown in the 2005 results. Teachers are tracking students' performance much better now to identify underachievement. Although the use of this information is still not consistent across all subjects and teachers, most teachers are more accurate in setting challenging, but realistic, targets. This is having a positive impact on standards and achievement. It is too early to be certain that the 2006 results will show significant improvement and will meet the school's targets, but the evidence from early entries at GCSE and the Year 11 'mock' examinations is encouraging. The English results were particularly encouraging, but other subjects are also more positive, helped by the concentration by many students on taking a smaller, and more manageable, number of subjects. The achievement of students with learning difficulties and disabilities has improved in line with that of other students from the very low levels of the last school year.

Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students taking vocational courses achieve well, with many benefiting substantially from their courses with average standards. Standards of those taking A levels are low compared with national standards, with low numbers taking many courses. Although variable, achievement is just satisfactory overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students are friendly and polite, and relationships between themselves and with adults are good. Cohesion within the multi-cultural school community is commendably strong. Students enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their very good levels of attendance. Punctuality is improving and is good. Students with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, and disaffected pupils, become more positive about their lives because they receive good support.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness has improved since the last inspection and is good. There is extensive celebration of their diverse cultures and faiths. Spiritual development, however, is too confined to the well-planned faith assemblies, with less evidence in other areas of the school's work.

Students learn how to be safe and healthy as part of a good, enriching personal, social and health education programme. They also develop satisfactory workplace skills through work experience, careers guidance and other opportunities. Students participate well in a wide range of community activities. For example, they are currently supporting children in Africa and they take seriously their responsibilities as year and school council members. Students appreciate that staff listen to their views and then make changes by, for example, providing healthier options at lunchtime. Other schemes, such as the Junior Sports Leader Award, are very successful in challenging students to extend their personal skills and talents.

Behaviour is satisfactory. Most students are adjusting to, and welcoming, the higher expectations of behaviour set by the new headteacher. Pupils feel safe in school and believe that bullying is rare. In discussions, Year 7 pupils talked animatedly and positively about their work on anti-bullying measures.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. This year, the school's leadership has taken a number of successful steps to improve the quality of teaching. Close monitoring has led to the implementation of an effective training programme, and the number of qualified teachers has increased. As a result, most teaching is satisfactory but the amount of good and outstanding teaching is still low. This is because students are not always sufficiently actively involved in lessons with a practical exercise or a problem to solve. As a result, they find some lessons dull and are not stimulated to make progress at a fast rate. So, although teaching is competent, it does not always stretch students to their limits. This is particularly the case when planning does not always ensure that the needs of all learners are met.

Where good routines are established, students settle quickly to work, and respond with good behaviour. In most lessons, literacy skills are appropriately emphasised and students are given help with writing, punctuation and spelling. The school has recognised the need to provide more opportunities for students to read and most teachers are planning for this. Through their relevance and enjoyment, the best lessons fully engage students' interests. For example, a first-rate sixth form health and social care lesson involved students in preparing a drama about some of the functions of the human body to present to children in a local primary school. The students and the teacher were totally involved as a whole group in work of a high order, with excellent discussion of ideas taking learning forward very quickly.

Teachers are now receiving better information about the potential of their students and are using it to set clear targets for achievement in examinations. The marking of students' work is not being done consistently by all teachers, and the quality of marking is not always good enough to help students know how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is inadequate and does not meet the needs of all students. It meets statutory requirements, but students have been taking too many courses to allow learning to be properly consolidated. There have been insufficient pathways to cater for students of differing abilities and aptitudes. This has been a particular problem for lower attainers and those with learning difficulties. Weaknesses in the curriculum have been significant contributory factors to students' poor progress. However, changes since September in Years 10 and 11 have helped to create a better balanced programme for most students. The curriculum planned for next year has the potential to create long-term, sustainable improvements with good and relevant pathways for all students. Despite its inadequacies, there are already many good features about the present curriculum. Booster classes, including many outside normal school hours, are well attended and much valued by students. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are good, especially in the arts and technology, and the school has an enviable and justified high reputation for sporting activities. Literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are promoted well, but there are weaknesses in developing students' numeracy skills.

Sixth form vocational courses are relevant to the local area and match students' needs well. The range of high quality academic courses that can be offered is limited by the relatively small numbers who return to take them. However, for most students, an adequate choice is available

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school is aware that some of its procedures require updating, but arrangements for the care and welfare of students

are sound. There is good support for students' personal development, especially for those with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Good links with the careers service, and other professionals, give effective guidance to students at key stages in their school careers. Very effective work by the attendance team ensures that attendance remains high.

There are good procedures to identify students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Students with particular gifts and talents receive satisfactory support, with several fast track programmes for early examination entries.

Students are kept well informed about their subject targets. The quality of the guidance and advice they receive from teachers on how to achieve these targets is, however, inconsistent. The role of the form tutors in supporting students' academic progress is at an early stage of development and is a weak link in the school's overall guidance provision.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has provided much-needed stability and a sense of direction to the staff as a whole. This is having a very positive impact on the quality of provision and on the ethos of the school, which is recognised and supported by the students, teachers and parents. Her leadership is outstanding. She is resolutely tackling weaker areas of the school's work, based on accurate and perceptive analyses of all aspects of the school. Under the headteacher's leadership, members of the senior management team are now able to work effectively to their strengths. There is a good balance of those with strengths in administration and management, as well as those capable of effective strategic thinking and planning. Consequently, there is a good capacity to improve.

Senior managers monitor the professional performance of teachers effectively and accurately to achieve a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in order to take appropriate action. As part of the same process, they are beginning to train middle managers to perform a similar function. The leadership and management skills of curriculum leaders are much more varied, with some faculties well led, whilst there are others where leadership is inadequate. This variability has not been addressed until recently and, in turn, has led to inconsistencies in the achievement of students in different subjects.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The creation of a safe environment within which students feel that they will be well supported is a strength. However, the progress of individual students against expectations of potential attainment is inadequately monitored. As a result, it is not clear that all students are achieving as well as they could.

A few parents are critical of the school, but most feel that their links and involvement with the school are adequate. Several commented favourably about recent improvements. Finances are well managed, and the school has a reasonable surplus for future development. The interim executive board and the shadow governing body

are now providing the school with suitable challenge and support. Technology College status has had a positive impact on the curriculum and learning resources through developments in technology and the provision of ICT equipment, but is not monitored effectively enough to ensure that its full potential in raising standards is realised.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so welcoming and friendly to us when we visited your school. Your views are very important. We enjoyed meeting you, and we value very much the help you gave us.

There are many good things about your school. You get on well with each other and with your teachers, and you told us how much you appreciate the opportunities teachers give you to take part in a wide range of activities. Your attendance at school is particularly good, and this reflects the fact that most of you enjoy school. You welcome opportunities to have your say in the running of the school through the school council. Many of you told us that your new headteacher is involving you much more, and that lots of improvements are taking place. You are right. We believe that your headteacher is providing outstanding leadership for the school. She is supported very well by other senior teachers and all the staff of the school.

We are pleased about this because, despite many good things, much improvement is needed in the school. Many of you are not achieving as well as you should, and recent results have not been good enough.

We are asking the school to take steps to improve a number of things, but particularly these areas:

- Improve the progress you make significantly.
- Make sure that what you are taught is suitable for what you need.
- Increase the amount of good teaching in lessons.
- Make sure that the teachers who are in charge of subjects are all able to lead their subjects equally successfully.

We are encouraged by the improvements to all these areas that are already taking place, but there is still quite a long way to go. We believe you will want to play your part in helping the school to continue to improve by using your energy and talents to work hard and to do your best. I wish all of you good luck for the future.