



Blythe Bridge High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124396
LEA Staffordshire
Inspection number 281712
Inspection dates 17 May 2006 to 18 May 2006
Reporting inspector David Anstead HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Cheadle Road
School category	Community		Blythe Bridge
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST11 9PW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 392519
Number on roll	1034	Fax number	01782 388261
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	6 December 1999	Headteacher	Mrs S Schanda

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 17 May 2006 - 18 May 2006	Inspection number 281712
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Blythe Bridge High School is an 11–18 school of average size. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals and the proportion with learning difficulties or disabilities are both well below average. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds represent a much lower proportion than the national average. A recovery plan has been agreed with the Local Authority to pay off a budget deficit of around £120,000. The headteacher took up post recently.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Students enjoy coming to this school. It is a friendly community where behaviour and relationships are good. The curriculum provides choice and flexibility and meets students' needs. Students appreciate the good range of lunch-time and after-school activities. Students are well cared for and the support for students with learning difficulties or disabilities is outstanding. However, until recently, the school's results were not keeping pace with the national trend. The recently appointed headteacher is dealing with a backlog of issues requiring urgent attention. Since taking up post, she, with good support from the Local Authority, has implemented a short-term plan which has brought about rapid improvement. Her strong, dynamic and effective leadership is, after only two terms, having an impact on the school. There are noticeable improvements in the quality of leadership and management. The school now has a clear purpose and better understands what it needs to do to improve. However, there is still much to do. Too many lessons fail to stimulate students' interest. The level of difficulty in many lessons is not sufficiently matched to individuals' capabilities. Guidance to students on how to improve is inconsistent. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is not sufficiently rigorous. Satisfactory progress has been made on issues from the last inspection. The school has a good capacity to continue to improve. Its own evaluation of its overall effectiveness as satisfactory is accurate. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is now satisfactory. Measures introduced by the recently appointed head of the sixth form, requiring more rigorous and demanding study, have substantially improved the ethos for learning and achievement. Leadership of the sixth form is good. Students value their opportunity to study at the school. Their progress and standards are monitored against challenging personal targets, with their general development nurtured through a system of tutorials offering individual advice and supervision. Students are involved in study and other activities outside their specialist subjects, taking advantage of the school enrichment programme and contributing to their wider community through voluntary activities and charity functions. Teaching is satisfactory and students receive good advice and encouragement. Inspectors agree with the school's own evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form as being satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make lessons more interesting by providing guidance to students on how they can improve and matching work more closely to individual students' capabilities.
- Ensure greater rigour and accuracy in the judgements made when monitoring and evaluating lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The attainment of students joining the school in Year 7 varies between above average and broadly average. Students make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 to achieve standards which are generally above average by the end of Year 9. Progress is best in mathematics but weaker in English and science.

During Key Stage 4, students continue to make satisfactory progress. Standards in GCSE examinations are generally above average, with nothing significantly below average. Standards in art and design, business and communication technology and music are particular strengths. Girls and boys make similar progress and no particular groups of students underachieve. All Year 11 students achieved at least five graded GCSE subjects last year. This is substantially better than the national average and reflects the excellent support that less able students receive. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities make outstanding progress at Key Stage 4.

Progress made by sixth form students is satisfactory and standards are broadly average. However, the previous policy of allowing Year 13 students to drop A-level courses has meant that sixth form students have had a below average number of points which count towards university entrance. The policy has now been changed.

The school follows national guidance in setting performance targets derived from prior attainment. The target for last year was not met, nevertheless, the school has set a similarly challenging target for this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development of students is good. Students enjoy coming to school. They particularly appreciate the good support they receive and the variety of extra-curricular activities available. Attendance is good, being above the national average, and unauthorised absence is well below average. Students are polite and well behaved in most lessons and about the school. Attitudes to learning are good. Any minor disruptions are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students feel safe in school and are confident that any bullying will be well dealt with.

Encouraged by the school, most students adopt a healthy lifestyle, choosing the healthier options now available in the canteen. A high proportion of students participate in additional sporting activities at lunchtime and after lessons. The services provided by the school nurse are extensive, varied and much valued and have a very positive effect on the good health of students. Opportunities for students to take responsibility are good. Their views are heard and acted upon through a very active school council. Form representatives have a variety of duties and all year groups are involved in fundraising for a variety of charities. The jazz orchestra is regularly invited to play for community groups. Students develop good skills that contribute to their economic well-being. Younger students are introduced to the world of work through the

citizenship programme of study. Year 10 students take part in work placements and develop business skills in an organised enterprise week. Satisfactory spiritual development is promoted through religious education and a variety of other subjects across the curriculum. Students have a mature approach to moral and cultural issues but their understanding of the multicultural nature of Britain is less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory both in the main school and in the sixth form. Some good lessons were observed and many lessons have some good features. However, the school recognises that the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent. Monitoring of lessons by the leadership team is not sufficiently focused on the ways in which teaching influences learning. Inspectors agree with the school's overall evaluation of teaching and learning as being satisfactory. The school's teaching and learning forum is addressing the need to improve the quality of teaching. In the best lessons seen, teachers use their good knowledge of their subjects well to support learners. Lessons are well planned, with tasks matched to individual ability. In these lessons, students enjoy and take a pride in the work they produce. Relationships are based on respect and students are enthusiastic and attentive. They work well together and help each other in group activities. Where teaching is weaker, planning is less effective and often the purpose of a task is not well explained. Some lessons lack challenge and tasks are uninteresting and not well matched to students' abilities. This results in them not being engaged in their work and then standards of behaviour fall. Assessment is satisfactory. Although pupils are aware of their levels or target grades, this is not always backed up by clear guidance to students on how they can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has identified weaknesses in the current curriculum and has introduced a good curriculum for the coming academic year. At the moment at Key Stage 3, the school provides a broad and balanced range of activities that meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. For next year, the time allocation for English and mathematics has been increased to improve standards in literacy and numeracy. The curriculum for 14 to 19 year olds offers good choice and flexibility in meeting all students' needs. There is a good range of vocational options and some exceptional opportunities offered through a partnership with a local college. It also offers extra support for students with the potential to achieve grade C in their chosen GCSE subjects. A good variety of enrichment activities, including music, sport, visits and opportunities to contribute to community events, enhances the formal curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. An excellent programme for new students introduces them to Year 7 and provides a very sound preparation for all aspects of secondary school life. Monitoring and tracking of academic progress are especially good in Key Stage 4 and a similarly rigorous system is being developed for Key Stage 3. Students are set challenging individual targets and have a clear understanding of how well they are doing. However, they do not receive sufficient guidance in some subjects on how to improve to achieve their targets. Underachieving students are identified in each year group. Their weaknesses are diagnosed and specific targets agreed to bring about improvement. Extensive additional support is provided through the "Spotlight" initiative. Evaluation indicates this is having a positive effect on progress. There is satisfactory careers guidance and much use is made of Connexions. Support for pupils with learning difficulties is excellent. There is a good programme of events and projects for gifted and talented students. Arrangements for child protection are well organised and reviewed appropriately. Good procedures are in place to support vulnerable children. The arrangements for ensuring health and safety are good and students work safely in practical lessons. Care, guidance and support in the sixth form are good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Within a very short period, the recently appointed headteacher has brought about urgently needed improvement to many aspects of the school's management. Using effective advice and support from the Local Authority, an interim improvement plan has been swiftly implemented. This has concentrated attention on raising standards, with underachieving students being identified for additional support. Expectations of senior managers' performance have been strengthened, with a focus on improving all aspects of teaching and learning. Action has been taken to eliminate a budget deficit without damage to staffing or to curricular provision. The school is now predicting a significant improvement in overall standards at GCSE and a subsequent increase in sixth form admissions.

The leadership and management of subjects are now conforming more closely to the school's priorities for improvement. Clear line management from senior staff is securing greater consistency in promoting higher teaching standards, in improving the assessment of students' progress, and the curriculum. The school runs smoothly on a daily basis.

Governance is good. Challenging interventions by the chair of governors on behalf of the governing body has demanded improvement to the school's leadership and management. The chair has a detailed working knowledge of the school and has secured progress through an interim plan to bring about the changes needed. The interim plan

has ensured that the improvements required from the last inspection have been made. Good forward planning for the next twelve months identifies clear goals and responsibilities and is replacing the short-term strategies. Self-evaluation is satisfactory. The school seeks the views of parents and students through questionnaires and addresses the main messages through its forward planning. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate. Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation of leadership and management as being satisfactory overall. That so much change has been accomplished in a short time under new leadership demonstrates clearly that there is a good capacity to improve.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	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	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

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	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	

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?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	2
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	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

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

Following our visit to inspect your school, I am writing to tell you about our findings. I would like to thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us and your honest responses to our questions. We found this helpful in deciding what is good about your school and what needs to be improved. We think the education you receive at your school is satisfactory.

These are the strengths of your school:

You told us you enjoy coming to school because it is a friendly place. You feel safe at school and appreciate the good range of lunchtime and after-school activities provided for you.

Behaviour and relationships are good. Even when Year 11 were signing each others' shirts on their last day in school, behaviour was never less than good.

The choice of subjects available to you is good.

The extra help and support some of you receive is good.

Your headteacher is rapidly making the school better.

There are some aspects of the school's work which we think can be better. In some lessons, the introductions are too long and you are all set the same tasks. You told us that these lessons were uninteresting and that you didn't learn as much as you would like to. We have asked your headteacher to help to ensure that all lessons are interesting for you and to check regularly on how it is going. We have also asked that you receive better guidance on what you need to do to improve to achieve your target grades. You can help by acting on the advice you are given. I wish you every success in the future.