



Wolgarston High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124415
LEA Staffordshire
Inspection number 281717
Inspection dates 1 February 2006 to 2 February 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	Cannock Road
School category	Community		Stafford
Age range of pupils	13 to 18		Staffordshire ST19 5RX
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01785 355500
Number on roll	847	Fax number	01785 716121
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr David Warburton
Date of previous inspection	11 December 2000	Headteacher	Mr Philip Tapp

Age group 13 to 18	Inspection dates 1 February 2006 - 2 February 2006	Inspection number 281717
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Wolgarston High School is an age 13–18 school, with Year 9 as the main year of entry. It is smaller than average but with a relatively large sixth form. This is the third year of its specialist technology status. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average as is the proportion of students with special needs. The school has used its own funding to open a Family and Student Services Centre. There is a leisure centre on site, which the school has dual use of during the day. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is much lower than the national average. The headteacher has been in post for one term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. In areas like science and food technology, students enjoy their learning and achieve well. The number of subjects where provision is good outweighs those where there are weaknesses. However the education provided by the school is inconsistent in quality. Provision in some subjects, such as information and communication technology (ICT) is not good enough. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students mostly enjoy school. In the best lessons students are well motivated, work hard and are well behaved. They have clear targets and know what they have to do to improve. However, this is not always the case as the quality of assessment and marking is inconsistent. A significant minority are not well motivated. Where lessons lack challenge, students engage in off task chatter and there is low level disruption. The headteacher recognises this and has rightly placed improving the learning culture as a key priority for the school.

Inspectors agree with many aspects of the school's evaluation of its own performance and the areas it has prioritised for improvement. However, the underperformance in some subject areas and the lack of progress in developing its specialist status programme mean that the overall effectiveness of the school is lower than its own rating.

In only one term the headteacher has swiftly taken robust action to tackle areas of specific weakness. His strong leadership has given the school a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory overall with some good features. In some subjects performance dipped in 2005 partly due to the absence of key staff. Not all students are aware of what they need to do to improve and some do not make best use of personal study time. Good systems are in place to help students make the transition to advanced level work. Individual tutorials are successful in monitoring progress and helping students but they are variable in quality. Recruitment to a wide range of courses is high and most of those who study A-level subjects complete their courses successfully. A high proportion of these are given good support in going on to further study. Strengths include the good pastoral and careers guidance and good links with outside providers. Students have good relationships with their tutors and are encouraged to maintain a balance between their studies and other activities, including a successful school council that gives them a voice in school development. Tutors know their students well. As a result, students enjoy their sixth form studies and appreciate the good support they receive. Although management of the sixth form is in a period of change, the school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in underperforming subjects and particularly in ICT
- Achieve the specialist status programme targets for both the school and the wider community
- Ensure consistency in the marking and assessment of students work so that they are clear about what they have to do to improve further
- Improve behaviour and attitudes to learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Students joining the school in Year 9 have above average levels of attainment. They make good progress in many subjects, but not all. Progress in ICT and business studies is poor. Until recently, progress was unsatisfactory in design and technology, though it is now good. Consequently, standards at GCSE in subjects such as science, food technology, textiles and physical education are above average, whilst in ICT and business studies students have not been achieving the levels of performance of which they are capable. The school makes good use of prior assessment data to set challenging targets. Due to the good performance of a majority of subjects, overall school performance targets are met. However unsatisfactory performance in design and technology and ICT, in particular, has meant the school has not achieved some of its specialist status targets. Students with special needs are well supported through the Family and Student Services Centre and make good progress. The least able girls in Key Stage 4 make outstanding progress. There is no underachievement by particular groups of students.

Standards in the sixth form are generally above average. Progress in some subjects such as sociology is good. However progress in other subjects, such as biology, English Literature and psychology has been unsatisfactory. Overall students make satisfactory progress in their A levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are satisfactory overall. Most students enjoy school and have good attitudes towards learning. With many teachers, they show high levels of interest, work hard and remain focused throughout lessons. Despite these good features, however, many parents and students express dissatisfaction with the misbehaviour of a significant minority of students in lessons. In some lessons visited during the inspection, students lacked focus on the task and their pace of learning was slow.

Attendance had been improving well but last year declined significantly. Now, as at the time of the last inspection, attendance is satisfactory, but barely so, being below the national average for secondary schools. The school recognises the need to work

with parents to improve the attendance of all students but especially those with higher levels of authorised absence. The plan is to appoint an attendance officer. The school monitors fixed term exclusions carefully and almost entirely avoids the use of permanent exclusion.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is satisfactory. Students develop the social skills and personal qualities they need for adult life. Work experience enables students to gain skills necessary for their future economic well-being. They feel secure at school and behave appropriately for their own and other's safety. Students say there is very little bullying and, in the rare instances where it has occurred, the school has been effective in stopping it. They welcome the school's introduction of healthier meals on two days a week. The learning councils enable students to contribute to plans for improving the school.

Students in the sixth form make a positive contribution to the school. They act as good role models for the rest of the school, especially through helping younger students with their learning.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Satisfactory teaching enables students to enjoy their education and, overall, make the progress expected of them. Students express satisfaction with most of their teachers because they explain things well and make lessons fun. However, a minority of teaching does not motivate students enough. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which enables them to teach with confidence. Students work well independently and enjoy the challenge of coursework. Although some teachers help students to achieve well by explaining clearly what they need to do to improve, this is not yet firmly embedded in all teaching. Assessment and marking of students' work are not consistently applied well. Consequently, students are not aware of their progress and this leads to underachievement in some subjects. The school is aware of this because it has a good system in place to monitor and review teaching, which has led to good plans to improve. Homework is inconsistently set and some students do not have enough work to do at home. Good use of resources, such as electronic whiteboards, facilitates well paced, interesting lessons.

Students with learning difficulties are supported well in lessons, with specific subject-related support to allow them to cope with the demands of class work. More able students are challenged through additional demands made upon them. Both groups, therefore, make good progress. Teaching in the sixth form is also satisfactory, with some outstanding elements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good range of appropriate courses and activities enriches the lives of learners because the curriculum is diversifying and growing. Flexible learning programmes, combining school work with courses elsewhere, meet students' interests and needs. The sixth form curriculum is also developing well, with an increasing choice of academic and vocational courses reflecting good partnerships with other colleges. There is insufficient impact, however, of the school's technology status across all subjects and in the community. Students have good provision for learning how to stay healthy and safe. They appreciate the good range of sport and other activities and take good advantage of the extended services available. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is popular and exciting. For example, 14 gold award candidates are planning their residential service in Borneo. Work-related learning is satisfactory and includes relevant work experience and training in work-related skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Students receive satisfactory care, guidance and support from the school. The school is good at identifying and supporting students who are at risk. Teachers and learning assistants give effective support to students with special educational needs in lessons. The Family and Student Services Centre is an important and recent innovation that has raised, and has the potential to raise further, the quality of the school's provision for its more vulnerable students. The school uses additional support from external agencies as necessary. The school provides for students' safety through risk assessment and through ensuring that students adopt safe practices. The school has also begun to improve the provision for healthy living.

The questionnaire returns from parents indicate that many find the school unresponsive to their concerns. They want more recognition of their role in supporting their own children's progress and personal development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is deeply committed to ensuring that all students achieve well. He has a good grasp of the issues to be addressed, and plays a key role in driving improvement forward. Robust action is improving specific weaknesses in teaching and learning. Recent improvements brought about in design and technology, for example, show the school has the capacity to improve. The headteacher regards the development of a learning culture, a sense of belonging, and effective communication, as fundamentally important to the school's improvement. Management is being restructured to ensure that these objectives are achieved. The headteacher is well supported by senior and middle managers, many of whom are currently working in an acting capacity pending permanent appointments.

Rigorous procedures for school self-evaluation and performance management, including regular lesson observations, are effective in identifying areas for improvement. Senior managers' judgements about the quality of teaching are generally accurate. The views of parents are sought. The school is beginning to respond to common concerns raised by parents about disruption in some lessons and inconsistent setting of homework. Resources, including ICT, are used well to enhance learning. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

It is too early for many of the recently introduced management strategies to be fully effective. For example, the returns made by parents to the inspection questionnaire expressed a high level of concern about communication with the school despite recent improvements. The lack of clearly defined arrangements for managing the school's specialist status programme makes it difficult to monitor the achievement of targets and to keep the programme on track.

The governing body is strongly supportive of the school. Governors are proactive in seeking to improve the premises, and are becoming increasingly involved in systematically monitoring the school's performance.

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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?	3	3
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	2
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?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	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?	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	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	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 our findings. Thank you for your willingness to talk openly and frankly to the inspection team. We found this very helpful in understanding what you thought was good about the school and what you thought could be improved.

In the majority of your subjects, teaching is good. Your teachers plan interesting work which you enjoy. In these lessons you work hard and focus on the task in hand. Your teachers explain clearly to you what you have to do to improve. However, not all lessons are as good as this. In a few of your subjects the work is uninteresting and the pace of the lesson slow. Assessment of your work in these lessons does not show you what you need to do to reach your targets. Although most of you behave well all the time, a few of you disrupt lessons and disturb the learning of others. You told us that you think the learning councils the headteacher has set up are a good idea and will help improve behaviour.

You particularly appreciate the vocational courses the school enables you to choose from in Year 10. Many of you participate in the good range of sports and other activities the school provides for you during and after school. There are more strengths than weaknesses in what the school provides and so overall you receive a satisfactory standard of education.

Your headteacher is already making the school better. We have asked him to work with your teachers to make sure all lessons are good. We have also asked him to raise the profile of the school's specialist technology status within the school and in the local area. You must all support the efforts the school is making to create a purposeful working atmosphere in every classroom.

I wish you every success in the future.