



The Ellowes Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 103871
LEA Dudley

Inspection number 284017
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2006
Reporting inspector Chris Redman AI

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

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Stickley Lane
School category	Foundation		Dudley
Age range of pupils	11–18		West Midlands DY3 2JH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01384 817915
Number on roll	1042	Fax number	01384 817916
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr G Marsh
Date of previous inspection	22-25 November 2004	Headteacher	Mr A S Griffiths

Age group 11–18	Published March 2006	Reference no. 284017
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Introduction

When The Ellowes Hall School was inspected in November 2004, its sixth form was judged to be inadequate because it has significant weaknesses in the curriculum, the guidance for post-16 education and in leadership and management. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) subsequently visited the sixth form on two occasions to monitor its progress. The sixth form was reinspected by two Additional Inspectors in March 2006.

Description of the school

The Ellowes Hall School is an averaged sized 11-18 comprehensive school with specialist sports status. It serves predominantly the small insular area of Gornal in Dudley. In order to raise Gornal out of the lowest 10% of wards in the country for education, skills and training, the governors have maintained for many years a fierce determination to offer access to sixth form education to as many students as possible. Although the sixth form is attracting increasing numbers, it is small with only 57 students. Class sizes in Year 13 are predominantly very small, but in Year 12 they are generally larger.

Key for inspection grades

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

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

The school's previous designation as having an inadequate sixth form no longer applies.

The leadership, management and governance of the sixth form have improved markedly since the inspection in November 2004. Senior managers have improved the quality of education and raised the expectations of what students can achieve. Although the small number of students means that the sixth form offers comparatively few subjects, the curriculum caters adequately for different levels of study. Senior managers have a good understanding of the quality of provision and the capacity to improve it further.

Standards, although low, are rising. Students make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons but weak literacy and problem solving skills too frequently restrict their achievement. Good guidance is provided to ensure students embark on relevant courses. As a result, drop out rates are very low and student recruitment is rising. However, the small numbers in some classes, particularly in Year 13, restrict the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The students' personal development is satisfactory but the sixth form is not sufficiently well integrated with the rest of the school. Opportunities to develop students' role as models for younger pupils are therefore underdeveloped. The personal and academic care, guidance and support received by students are good.

The Ellowes Hall School has an improving and effective sixth form that provides an acceptable standard of education and offers satisfactory value for money.

Grade: 3

What the school should do to improve further

- Accelerate learning by ensuring strategies to improve the students' literacy, problem solving and independence are consistently used, particularly where classes are small.
- Ensure students' personal development is improved by effectively implementing the plans for them to play a more central role in the life of the school.
- Raise standards and achievement by continuing to improve student recruitment so that teaching and learning strategies used in lessons can be extended.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Standards on entry to the sixth form are well below the levels found typically in other schools. Although results in GCE Advanced level are below national figures, they are improving. For example, the A2 pass rates increased by 11% to 92% in 2005 and the quality of the grades also improved. The rate of progress achieved by students during their two years in the sixth form improved markedly, but remained slower than typical nationally. However, some achievement was good. For example, the progress made by Year 12 students studying English literature was significantly above national figures.

Currently, standards are improving further and achievement is satisfactory. The results of recent assessments show that almost all students are producing work equivalent to at least their minimum target grades and 20% have achieved at least one grade better. In general, the work in lessons was typical of post-16 students nationally with good standards in business studies and art. However, few students were working at the highest levels.

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory with good aspects. Relationships, attitudes towards school and behaviour are very good, and students' attendance is good. Students speak positively about how they enjoy their education. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. They have well developed moral views and can express their values and beliefs but the restricted opportunities available to them to understand different religious practices places limitations on their personal development. Students are aware of how they can be healthy and most take advantage of their core physical education lessons for exercise. Students contribute well to sixth form life. They organise events, work for charities, and some help with after school activities and support younger pupils. However, although some make a significant contribution to the whole school community, too many are not adequately involved. Nevertheless, exciting plans are in place to address this weakness soon. The students' positive attitudes and behaviour are effectively contributing to the improving reputation of the sixth form. Although currently students do not have enough opportunities to take on formal responsibilities in the leadership and management of the school, they see this as an area in which they can make a valuable contribution. Students gain good workplace skills, particularly those involved with business studies.

Grade: 3

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Much of the teaching is good and it is outstanding in business studies and art. However, where class sizes are small, the range of teaching and learning approaches used is more restricted. In larger classes, teachers use group and whole class discussions well to extend the students' oral and problem-solving skills but in small classes such techniques are used with greater difficulty and learning is adversely affected as a result. Recently, attention has been paid to helping students improve their literacy skills but this tends to be more successful in larger groups and is too often overlooked where classes are small.

Lesson planning is good and is well informed by the good subject knowledge of the teachers. Lessons are interesting and the work is challenging, reflecting teachers' appropriate expectations of what students can achieve. Probing questions are skilfully posed requiring students to think carefully about their work and solve appropriate problems. Lessons are well structured and usually include a wide range of activities.

Students use their time well in lessons. Most are confident to ask questions to clarify their understanding of the topic but few introduce fresh ideas or debate subject issues with the teacher. Progress is sound overall. Where the teaching is most successful progress is good but some students are too dependent on their teacher's guidance to help them make adequate progress, particularly in classes of one or two. Students said how much they value the close supervision of their work in class and the frequent support they receive in and out of lessons but, at times, the extent of this support detracted from helping them improve their own independence in learning especially in small classes.

Grade: 3

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is satisfactory. There is a suitable range of Level 2 courses, including English and mathematics for those who wish to improve their grades. Level 3 courses include vocational opportunities but the range is narrow. Links with the local further education college valuably extend some students' opportunities for study but the school has not been successful in securing similar links with other schools. The curriculum broadly offers current students the range of courses which meet their needs and aspirations. Further improvements are being considered to meet the increasing interest of Year 11 pupils in the sixth form. There is now satisfactory provision for religious education. Sound provision is made to develop students' economic well-being.

The range of extracurricular activities is good, enriching the curriculum well, particularly expressive arts and sporting activities. In addition, a good range of educational visits and enterprise activities enhances students' learning. Overall progress improving the curriculum has been good.

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Students are well known by their teachers and they speak highly of the support that they receive. Tutorial sessions are well used to support students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, especially in relation to the assemblies which students lead. Effective guidance procedures are well used to advise Year 11 pupils of their options for education after the age of 16 and for training, higher education and employment when they are 18. Students have access to a wide range of information in relation to their well-being and personal development. Although the statutory requirements for collective worship are not fully met there are innovative plans using information and communication technology that will remedy this weakness. The improved use of assessment procedures means that students understand their targets and work hard to meet them. The quality of marking is satisfactory overall. Sometimes it is very good but it varies too much and students do not always understand how to improve their work. Health and safety procedures, including risk assessments, are good and the school takes care to protect vulnerable students.

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory overall and good in several respects. The previous inspection in 2004 reported that insufficient attention had been given to the sixth form by the leadership and governors, this is no longer the case. Governors have worked determinedly to retain the sixth form. One governor is linked formally to the sixth form and, together with the chair of governors, monitors its development well. As a result, governance is now good. The school has introduced imaginative initiatives to quickly improve its provision. For example, a conference for students and staff, attended by two governors and representatives from the local authority and Learning Skills Council, helped to inform management decisions and provide clear and appropriate aspirations for the sixth form's future.

Senior managers have reinvigorated the leadership and management of the sixth form and now have a good understanding of the strengths of provision and areas for development. Monitoring of teaching and learning is good. The

new head of sixth has implemented academic procedures more firmly. For example, students report that systems for assessing and reviewing their work are more consistently implemented and they are rigorously required to use effectively the time set aside for private study. Clear and appropriate guidance is given to students before they are accepted onto courses so that drop out rates are minimal and achievement has risen significantly, a major improvement since 2004. Recruitment into the sixth form has increased. This has helped to reduce considerably the financial subsidy that the sixth form was receiving from the rest of the school. The school reasonably judges that Year 12 students should take three AS subjects rather than the more usual four. This has had the associated benefit of reducing staffing costs. Specialist sports status has been used well to introduce a range of vocational courses, extend sports qualifications, such as leadership awards, and provide opportunities for the students to take on responsibilities, hence helping their personal development.

Senior managers have given the sixth form the right amount of emphasis compared to the main school. They have lifted expectations and clarified the associated responsibilities of both staff and students to ensure teaching and learning are successful. They have demonstrated a good capacity to continue to secure further improvements. The local authority's support since the 2004 inspection was initially unsatisfactory but improved rapidly and is now suitably focused and effective.

Grade: 3

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?		3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage		
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation		2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements		Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection		Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?		3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?		3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?		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. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

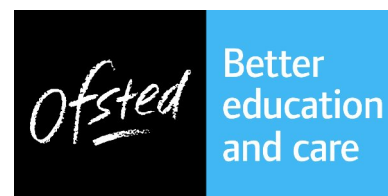
Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?		3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education		
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review		
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can		
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money		
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities		
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected		Yes
Does this school require special measures?		No
Does this school require a notice to improve?		No

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

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

T 0207 421 6800
F 0207 421 6707
www.ofsted.gov.uk



The Students
The Ellowes Hall School
Stickley Lane
Dudley
West Midlands
DY3 2JH

March 2006

Dear Students

You will remember that two inspectors visited The Ellowes Hall School recently. I am writing to let you know what we found. Thank you for making us very welcome during our two days with you. We appreciated the friendly and open way in which you shared your very positive views about life in the sixth form and your thoughtful suggestions for how improvements could be made in the future. It is clear to you, as it is to us, that the sixth form is a much better place to learn than it was a year or so ago. You will be pleased to know that we judged the sixth form at The Ellowes Hall School to be effective because it now provides an acceptable standard of education. The headteacher, senior managers and teachers have worked hard to successfully make improvements where they were required and they have very good plans for further developments in the future. As a result, we have informed the Department for Education and Skills that the sixth form is no longer inadequate.

The way your sixth form is led and managed has improved markedly since it was last inspected in November 2004. Although the number of courses available to you is relatively small, they are well matched to your needs and interests. The standard of your work is rising. Last year more students successfully completed their courses and passed examinations. The work we saw showed us that you are currently on track to do even better in the examinations this year. Some of the teaching you receive is outstanding and much of it is good. Your teachers plan interesting and challenging activities but where you are in small classes, sometimes as the only student, the options available to them are restricted and this, now and again, limits your progress.

You told us how much you appreciated the close and careful supervision of your work and valued your teachers' guidance in lessons and at other times. Occasionally you were too reliant on their support and not always learning how to solve problems for yourselves. We have asked your staff to help you improve your problem solving abilities and encourage you to become more independent learners. We have also asked that they help you to improve your literacy skills because these are so crucial for high achievement.

You have played a valuable part in helping to review the place of the sixth form in the life of the school. Many of you look forward to planned opportunities to become role models for younger pupils and to share further responsibilities for their education, recognising that these will help you to develop skills and status that will be valuable in life after school.

We enjoyed sharing your experiences of the sixth form and were impressed by your hard work and enthusiasm.

We wish you well with your future studies.

Yours sincerely

Chris Redman
Lead inspector