

# Wheelers Lane Technology College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	103501
<b>Local Authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	286680
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 April 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Rob Hubbleday HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	602
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	John Pearson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Deborah James
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14 January 2002
<b>School address</b>	Wheelers Lane Kings Heath Birmingham B13 0SF
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 4442864
<b>Fax number</b>	0121 4440540

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

The school serves three distinct communities: a large, predominantly White council estate; an inner city, largely Pakistani community; and private housing in the immediate vicinity of the school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above average. Although attainment on entry is usually broadly average, there are fewer high-attaining pupils than the national profile. An above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties. New accommodation on the same site is nearing completion and the school expects to leave its current building a few weeks after the inspection.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school's effectiveness is satisfactory. Standards have been improving slowly but are below average overall despite a relatively high proportion of pupils gaining five or more good passes at GCSE. Science, one of the school's specialist areas, has remained the most consistent of the core subjects while performance in English and mathematics has sometimes stuttered. Difficulties caused by staffing and the bedding down of new courses are largely resolved and the pupils are now making satisfactory progress. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because of the well organised provision based on a careful assessment of each pupil's needs.

The pupils' personal development is satisfactory and their attendance has improved dramatically since the last inspection and is also satisfactory. Most pupils are thoughtful and well behaved but a small minority react badly to weak teaching and are difficult to manage. The school cares for its pupils satisfactorily but academic guidance and mentoring from form tutors varies in quality. Opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility for aspects of their learning or to contribute to the running of the school are limited. Apart from sport, which is a strength of the school, there are few extra-curricular activities to enrich the pupils' experience.

The curriculum has improved considerably since the last inspection. The introduction of a strong vocational element for pupils in Key Stage 4 has received particular emphasis. Specialist status has enabled the school to expand its resources for information and communication technology (ICT) and to build on its strengths in design and technology. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with much that is good. Work in history, for example, shows how powerful the use of assessment can be in helping all pupils achieve well. Not all departments have this level of insight and, consequently, teaching is less effective than it might be in securing good rates of progress. Across the school and often within departments, marking is of inconsistent quality. This range is mirrored in other aspects of teaching, such as the extent to which pupils are encouraged to question, debate and reflect.

The school's leaders and managers have demonstrated that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Systematic reviews of each department and regular monitoring of teaching ensure that evaluation is accurate. Priorities are clearly identified and the school has moved forward. However, inconsistencies in the quality of the school's work persist because the leadership team has not pursued whole-school themes with sufficient focus and clarity. Subject departments vary widely in their effectiveness and middle managers are sometimes unclear about lines of accountability.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce inconsistencies in the quality of the school's work by improving the clarity and rigour of improvement planning, line management arrangements and monitoring.
- Enhance the pupils' personal development by extending opportunities for them to contribute more to the running of the school, take responsibility for aspects of their learning, participate in discussions and experience a wider range of extra-curricular activities.
- Improve the use of assessment information by departments and teachers when planning and evaluating lessons and by form tutors when offering challenge and support to pupils.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

At Key Stage 4, attainment has been improving over the last three years but is still below average. The proportion of pupils gaining five A\*-C grades rose strongly in 2005 to 50% and this level was maintained in 2006. In addition, nearly all the pupils achieved at least one pass at grade G or above. Attainment in English and mathematics, which was exceptionally low in 2004, is now below average. The pupils have made better progress each year from their starting points in Year 7 but achievement is only just satisfactory. Improvements in provision for mathematics, for example, have been slow to take effect and, as recently as last year, many pupils made inadequate progress in this subject. Rates of progress are better this year and are satisfactory. The pupils are well placed to achieve higher results in mathematics and in other subjects despite entering the school with generally lower attainment than last year's group of Year 11 pupils. There is also an improving trend at Key Stage 3 and the pupils have generally made secure and satisfactory progress, although standards have remained below average. Pupils performed particularly well in English and science in 2005 and in mathematics in 2006. However, staffing difficulties in English in 2006 caused performance to plummet. These problems have been resolved and the pupils are back on course to achieve satisfactorily.

Across the school, data indicate that different groups of pupils have made varying degrees of progress over the last few years. The inspection team looked in particular at the achievement of Pakistani pupils, pupils in the middle sets and pupils with learning difficulties. The team concluded that there were no substantial grounds for concern and that, in fact, pupils with learning difficulties were making good progress.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Attendance has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and the majority behave sensibly in lessons. However, a number of parents and pupils raised concerns about the poor behaviour of a small number of pupils. Pupils report that this is often the result of teaching which is mundane or which does not involve them actively in learning. The inspection team observed only one instance of poor behaviour in class. The school is orderly and calm but there are a high number of temporary exclusions because of the school's high expectations of behaviour.

Pupils express their views and raise concerns through the school council but its potential is not fully exploited as it meets only on an ad hoc basis. Pupils in Year 11 take on responsibilities as prefects and in their work as mentors to younger pupils. There are, however, relatively few opportunities for younger pupils to take on responsibilities.

Most pupils develop a good sense of right and wrong and largely respect one another's views and opinions. Relationships between different ethnic groups are harmonious and pupils generally act safely in and around school. Spiritual development has not improved since the previous inspection and pupils do not have sufficient opportunities through the curriculum to reflect on and discuss matters beyond the here and now. They participate well in sport in lessons and teams. Many choose sensibly from the healthy school lunch menus. Some pupils, however, continue to bring in less healthy food from home. The school is aware that a number of pupils

smoke and has taken steps to help them to give up. Pupils develop satisfactorily skills that will be of use to them in adult life, through their vocational courses and work experience.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and in the large sample of lessons seen by the inspection team was better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of what the pupils can achieve. Lessons are well planned and pupils respond enthusiastically to direct questioning, practical activity and discussion. Their motivation is sustained through the use of a variety of teaching methods, including good use of the interactive whiteboard when appropriate. In an outstanding physical education lesson, pupils thrived on completing an individual training programme and were actively engaged in monitoring and evaluating their own performance. In the least successful lessons, opportunities for group work and independent learning are overlooked by the teachers. Learning objectives are not referred to with sufficient emphasis, undermining the effectiveness of the lesson in promoting self-evaluation by the pupils of what they have achieved.

The quality of marking is inconsistent and ranges from good, supportive annotation which aids learning to examples of poorly presented and incomplete work which is not challenged. One area of good practice is history where targets for improvement, including some for gifted and talented pupils, are recorded and provide a clear indication of how well individuals are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Assessment procedures are satisfactory, though the ongoing evaluation of data to aid pupils' learning and inform teaching practice is inconsistent.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The school's curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs and aspirations of pupils across both key stages. There is a strong and effective focus on developing pupils' literacy skills in Years 7 to 9, with a variety of well focused programmes for specific groups. Citizenship, information and communication technology and religious education are taught as separate subjects and fulfil statutory requirements, though little emphasis is placed on developing numeracy skills across the curriculum. In Years 10 and 11, a balance of accredited academic and vocational courses taught to various levels is available. The school works in successful partnership with a local college and other schools and recent developments have extended the range of vocational options, reflecting the school's specialist college status. Increasingly, individualised curriculum pathways are available, including small group activities and early examination entry for some pupils in design and technology and modern foreign languages. A number of curriculum extension activities are available, including enrichment days which contribute to the wider experience of subject areas. A large number of pupils take advantage of a broad programme of sports-based activities, including 'Sport for Life' for the few disaffected and vulnerable pupils. However, after-school clubs and interest groups, particularly for the arts and local culture, are minimal.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support for pupils are satisfactory. The school puts appropriate emphasis on regular attendance and good behaviour. Racial abuse is not tolerated and the very few racist incidents which occur are dealt with promptly and firmly. Pupils report that there is little bullying and that any incidents are dealt with effectively. Child protection arrangements meet current requirements and risk assessments are satisfactory. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and for vulnerable pupils is good. The least able pupils in each year group benefit from being taught in a small group in a stimulating environment. The school makes good use of links with external agencies to provide expertise and support in areas such as behaviour management. Pupils are guided well when making their option choices for Year 10 and guidance on education and careers beyond Year 11 is good.

The school has a good range of data about pupils' achievement and is beginning to monitor the progress of individuals satisfactorily. However, potentially valuable work undertaken by form tutors varies in quality from good to unsatisfactory. Although all students know their targets and have action plans to support their progress, these plans are sometimes too vague to be of much worth.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have ensured that some significant improvements have occurred since the last inspection. Key issues to do with mathematics, the curriculum, attendance and resources have been tackled effectively. Less progress has been made on improving opportunities for the pupils' broader development and in using assessment in teaching. The leadership has focused successfully on increasing the proportion of pupils attaining five good GCSE passes. Until recently, however, systems for identifying underachievement across all ability bands were insufficiently sophisticated. There is a clear structure for evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses based on a thorough process of departmental reviews. Monitoring of teaching is well organised and informative but lacks a sharp focus on a few whole-school areas for development. As a result, inconsistencies in the quality of work provided by different departments remain too high. School development planning has tackled pertinent priorities but has not defined targets precisely enough to communicate to all staff the necessity for urgent improvement. As a result, progress has been inconsistent. Lines of accountability have not always been clear to middle managers and this has allowed some slippage to occur.

Governors are keen and committed. They play a more active role than described in the inspection report of 2002 but are not as confident as they need to be in discussing performance data. They have played an important role in overseeing the development of the new building.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

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

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

27 April 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wheelers Lane Technology College, Wheelers Lane, Kings Heath, Birmingham, B13 0SF

Thank you for contributing to the inspection by giving us your views. I am particularly grateful to those groups who came out of lessons for formal meetings with inspectors. We have judged that the school is satisfactory and I am writing to give you a short summary of the findings which are in our full report.

Strengths.

- Standards are improving, especially when measured by the proportion of Year 11 pupils who gain five good passes at GCSE.
- Most of you make satisfactory progress and those with learning difficulties benefit from particularly effective support so they make good progress.
- Attendance has improved significantly and is satisfactory, as is behaviour.
- Teaching is satisfactory and some departments provide high quality lessons.
- There is a wide range of interesting subjects to study.
- The senior staff know the school's strengths and weaknesses and have made sure that important aspects have improved since the last inspection.

Areas for development.

- The school's leaders need to do more to make sure that the work in all subjects matches the quality of the best.
- The school needs to enrich your experience by providing more opportunities for you to play a fuller part in its life, ensuring that more lessons involve active participation and broadening the range of extra-curricular activities.
- Some teachers need to use assessment information more effectively when planning what work you need to attempt, and when checking that you are on course to achieve as well as you ought to do.

I wish you all the best at this exciting time as you prepare to move into your new building. I am sure you will soon forget the frustration of having lost most of your playground for over a year.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday Her Majesty's Inspector