



Shire Oak School (A Science College)

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104260
Local Authority Walsall
Inspection number 286893
Inspection dates 29–30 November 2006
Reporting inspector Kathleen Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Lichfield Road
School category	Foundation		Walsall Wood
Age range of pupils	11–18		Walsall WS9 9PA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01543 452518
Number on roll (school)	1333	Fax number	01543 373204
Number on roll (6th form)	170	Chair	Rick Gamble
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Gary Crowther
Date of previous school inspection	17 September 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	29–30 November 2006	286893

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Shire Oak School became a specialist science college in 2003. It is larger than average overall with a growing but average sized sixth form. Based on 2005 data there were fewer students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and low numbers of students with English as an additional language compared to national averages.

The school is situated to the north east of Walsall and serves an area of mixed housing from the full range of social and economic backgrounds. Attainment on entry in Year 7 is broadly in line with national averages.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with some outstanding aspects. The school has steadily improved overall standards since the last inspection in 2001. Standards are now above average and pupils make good and in some areas outstanding progress across Years 7 to 11 as a result of the strong focus placed on raising attainment. Teaching and learning are good overall and pupils make good progress. The quality of teaching is in some cases outstanding. Teachers show expertise in their subject areas and lessons are planned well in preparing pupils for examinations. This sometimes gets in the way of providing more creative and enjoyable activities for pupils to learn.

The school attaches great importance to the care, support and guidance of pupils which is outstanding. This is one of the key components in the school's success in improving pupils' achievements over recent years. The focus given to developing the pupils' literacy, numeracy and communication skills is starting to show a real impact on achievements and standards, especially in Years 7 to 9, and contributes significantly to their future economic and social well-being. The very good mentoring system enables sixth form students to play a part in supporting younger pupils in their learning and provides positive role models for them to aspire to. Personal development and behaviour are good and enhanced by the mutual respect shown between pupils and teachers. The school provides a safe and secure learning environment based on a clear understanding that bullying and disruptive behaviours displayed by pupils are not acceptable. Many pupils participate fully in the life of the school and enjoy taking part in the many extra-curricular activities available to them.

The school's specialist status as a science college has enhanced the curriculum provision and improved resources. Information and communication technology (ICT) facilities across the school and sixth form are very good and are used successfully. There is a good balance of academic and vocational courses available to meet the needs of all pupils across the school and sixth form. Although accommodation is good overall, some accommodation, especially the changing facilities for physical education, are in need of improvement.

Leadership and management of the school are good. The school has an outstanding focus on raising standards involving a whole-team approach which includes all senior managers and middle managers in self-evaluation and improvement planning. The school's capacity to make further improvements is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students' achievements are satisfactory overall. Students on entry have low levels of attainment compared to sixth form intake in similar sixth form provision within the locality. Examination success rates are broadly in line with national averages and most students make at least satisfactory progress. However, the extent to which individual students make progress does not reflect attainment levels at Year 11. Some high attaining students make less progress than students with low levels of attainment on

entry. Personal development of students is good. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in certain subject areas. Teaching and learning, however, are planned less effectively within lessons where there is a wide range of students with different abilities. The support students receive for career progression is good which is reflected in the successful destination outcomes for the vast majority of students. The usefulness of feedback obtained by students in relation to their progress against targets varies in quality across subject areas. The school recognises that target setting for students is an area for further evaluation and improvement. The curriculum on offer has improved as a result of increased referrals and matches students' needs more closely. Students act as mentors to younger students and gain in self-esteem and confidence as a result. Leadership and management are satisfactory. They recognise that achievements and standards are in need of further improvement and the development of sixth form provision is a key priority for the school within the school improvement plan. The school is now in a position to evaluate the impact of the recent improvements to sixth form provision and demonstrates good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the improved target setting and the monitoring of students' performance within the sixth form.
- Ensure that in the sixth form learning activities are planned to meet the needs of all students, so that they continue to make at least good progress.
- Further improve some accommodation, especially the changing facilities for physical education.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is good and standards are above average across Years 7 to 11. Pupils enter the school with attainment that is broadly average. In Year 9 national tests, standards have improved consistently over the last six years and these are now above average in English and science and well above average in mathematics, reflecting the impact of the school's specialist science status. At Key Stage 4 the proportion of pupils gaining five A*–C grades has improved markedly over the last three years and there is convincing evidence that standards are now above average. However, the measure of GCSE attainment that includes English and mathematics shows that boys' results, in particular, were below the national average. Although girls perform better than boys at GCSE, the attainment of both has improved because of the considerable emphasis placed by the school on raising achievement. In the sixth form, students enter with below average attainment compared to other sixth form intake locally, and although standards have shown an improvement over the last three years, the most recent results show that sixth form attainment is still broadly in line with national averages. Sixth formers' achievement is satisfactory overall, but higher attainers in the sixth form make less progress than other students.

Pupils' overall progress is good in the main school. Recent evidence from the 2006 results shows some areas of outstanding progress by both Year 9 and Year 11, particularly when measured against that of pupils in similar schools. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are gifted and talented make good progress because their differing needs are clearly identified and they receive constructive and enthusiastic support from staff.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Relationships are good and every pupil is valued and respected. They enjoy their education and this is supported by the attendance figures, which have improved since the time of the last inspection and are now satisfactory. There is very thorough monitoring of attendance, and the school now meets targets set. Pupils contribute enthusiastically to a range of activities both in and outside the taught day. They willingly undertake responsibilities, such as being part of the particularly effective 'buddy' system, or as mentors. The newly formed school council has already made an impact by raising issues and making decisions. The school places an important emphasis on healthy living, and the pupils' participation levels in activities satisfactorily reflect this. Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being through good development of basic skills and effective careers awareness. Those on vocational courses particularly value the experience gained and the preparation for work. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This is a reflection of effective whole-school policies and rules, which are known by all. They result in good behaviour both in and out of the classroom. Pupils have a good understanding of other cultures through subjects, and through other activities. For example, the school has connections with a school in Ghana.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Subject knowledge of teaching staff is very good. Most lessons are well planned with a good variety of strategies which consolidate learning well and prepare pupils for tests and examinations very effectively. ICT is successfully integrated across curriculum activities. Interactive whiteboards, projectors and the internal network in ICT suites is a strong aid to broadening the variety of teaching and learning approaches. Teachers' management of pupils is good and strong relationships between teachers and pupils reinforce learning. Teachers provide appropriate praise and sensitive responses to pupils during lessons, which boost their confidence and keep them motivated. Support for pupils

with additional learning needs within lessons is good and deployed effectively. In a small number of lessons observed, teaching and the pace of lessons was dictated by examination criteria which stifles creativity by both teachers and pupils. In the sixth form, teaching is not always planned well enough to account for the wide range of abilities in some classes. Student progress across ability levels was less evident in these lessons observed. Assessment of learning is good with most subjects clearly matching tasks and outcomes to National Curriculum or GCSE assessment criteria. Pupils generally know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The quality of marking of pupils' work, although very good in some subject areas, is yet to be of a consistently high standard across all subjects. Accelerated learning targets are appropriately set for those students with higher levels of ability and monitored well. Parents are kept informed of students' progress through regular review meetings.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good because it meets the range of needs and capabilities of the pupils. All statutory requirements are met, and the school makes good use of its specialist science status funding to improve the learning environment and to introduce extra courses, particularly in mathematics and science. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 appreciate the provision of four curriculum pathways which enable them to choose a more vocational or academic education. This provision ensures that all abilities are well catered for. The school has been active in extending its range of courses in the sixth form to provide for the full range of students' needs. Citizenship, enterprise and work related education are effectively embedded across the whole school within a good Skills for Life programme. Through themed days such as the Years 12 and 13 'Science versus Religion' day, students are encouraged to develop skills of group work, discussion and debate. A good range of after school clubs, master classes, activities and residential visits enriches the curriculum and develops in pupils their talents, aptitudes and interests outside the classroom. Enrichment programmes for gifted and talented pupils are exciting and innovative. Although changes to the curriculum have brought about some positive outcomes, particularly for pupils on the work related pathway in Years 10 and 11, the improvements have so far had insufficient time to fully impact on overall standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The excellent security systems help to ensure that pupils feel safe throughout the site. Child protection procedures are firmly in place, and known by all. There is a range of effective policies and practices that promotes the well-being of pupils and results in support offered when necessary. These include a range of strategies from a 'Time Out' room to the new Success Centre which provides additional support for those students with social, educational and

emotional difficulties. These have already had an effect on reducing the number of exclusions this term. Support for pupils is further enhanced by the development of the multi-disciplinary guidance forum, which results in the early identification of those pupils who need support, and ensures that appropriate provision is given, which may involve external support agencies. Anti-bullying cards are carried by all pupils, and the assistance offered results in incidents becoming known and dealt with immediately. Pupils are very positive about the effectiveness of the system. Pupils within the school are also extremely well supported academically. They have a clear understanding of their current attainment levels and what they need to do to improve. There is a comprehensive system of interventions, which includes mentors, booster sessions and targeted borderline groups. The system of setting targets and monitoring pupils' progress against them is not as rigorous or effective in the sixth form. This results in some students not achieving their expected target grades in the examinations they take.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership and is well supported by an experienced and dedicated team of senior colleagues and subject leaders. There is a strong and determined focus on driving up standards which is an outstanding feature. This common sense of purpose is evident from the precise ways in which roles and accountability are defined. It is also seen in the school improvement plan which is closely linked to its self-review procedures and performance management. This coherent approach to leadership and management has enabled the school to improve standards and achievement which are now good in the main school.

The school improvement plan identifies a small number of important priorities which emerge mainly from its rigorous monitoring and review of teaching and learning. The collaboration between senior and subject leaders in monitoring performance to meet challenging targets is a clear strength. This involves observation of lessons, the scrutiny of pupils' work and analysis of test and examination results. There is a sharp focus on improving teaching and the accurate judgements which are made about its quality are a particular strength. There has been significant development of the role of subject leaders since the last inspection who are now an integral part of the drive to raise standards.

Governors discharge their duties well and are fully involved in deciding priorities for improvement. The school conforms to recent government guidance for safeguarding pupils with robust procedures to vet all adults who have contact with pupils. Equal opportunities are well promoted through an inclusive curriculum. The school is well resourced and gives good value for money. All classrooms in the school have interactive whiteboards and ICT facilities are excellent. The standard of accommodation is good overall apart from in physical education which has yet to benefit from the governors ongoing programme to improve the learning environment. An exemplary partnership

with local primary schools is now well established through the use of specialist school funding. This has resulted in improved standards in mathematics and science for pupils when they join the school and has contributed well to a better transition from primary to secondary education. Parents are supportive of the school, and most responses given on the questionnaires reflect this.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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?	2	2
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?	1	2

¹ 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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Thank you for talking to inspectors who visited your school at the end of November. We were impressed how well behaved and helpful you were towards us. We also met with teachers and had many letters from parents. At the end of the inspection we concluded yours is a good school with some outstanding aspects.

What is good about your school

- Pupils in the school make good progress and there are signs that this is improving. Students make satisfactory progress in the sixth form.
- Teaching and learning are good overall. Some lessons are outstanding. Good relationships exist between yourselves and teachers which helps you to learn.
- You have a good range of subjects, activities and courses to follow across the school and sixth form.
- The care, support and guidance you receive are outstanding and your personal development is good.
- The school's leadership and management are good. Senior managers are very focused on improving your achievements and standards.

Improvements we would like the school to make

- Better target setting for students in the sixth form.
- Some lessons in the sixth form to be planned better to meet the needs of all students.
- Some accommodation, especially the changing facilities for physical education, needs to be improved.

Thank you again for your help with the inspection. We wish you every success in the future.