



Wath Comprehensive School : a Language College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106954
Local Authority Rotherham
Inspection number 287663
Inspection dates 13–14 December 2006
Reporting inspector Elizabeth Charlesworth

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Sandygate
School category	Community		Wath-on-Dearne, Rotherham
Age range of pupils	11–18		South Yorkshire S63 7NW
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01709 760222
Number on roll (school)	1751	Fax number	01709 761094
Number on roll (6th form)	298		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Irene Hartley
		Headteacher	Mrs Patricia Ward
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	13–14 December 2006	287663

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a very large school and specialist language college, one of two secondary schools serving the town of Wath. Following a period of change during the last five years, change of headteacher and senior staff and a completely new building on the existing school site, the school is now settled. The students come from a wide range of social backgrounds though broadly average overall as distinguished by the average proportion of students eligible for free school meals. There is a small number of young people in local authority care. Almost all students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average and includes a small number with physical and visual impairment. There is a local authority run visual impairment unit on site. The school holds Sportsmark Gold and the International Schools Award.

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 that has emerged successfully from a period of significant change. When judging its effectiveness and the elements that contribute to it, the school did not fully take into account the rapid rate of change that is resulting in improvements in students' attitudes and achievement. The new building has given students greater pride in their school and facilities for those with physical disability, including wheelchair users, are good, and give them access to all parts of school. Wath Comprehensive is in the midst of the community that it serves and enjoys a great deal of loyalty and support from students and their parents and carers. For many years students have run Bully Court and they attribute its success in minimising bullying in school to the fact that they themselves make the decisions. More recently a group of younger boys, concerned about the time lag before a bullying incident comes to court, have created 'Safe Havens'. This is a virtual and actual place of refuge where victims of bullying receive counselling and support. A mark of the success of Bully Court is the small number of cases of bullying in such a large school, and the students in Years 7 and 8 find Safe Havens a most valued resource. At present limited to Years 7 and 8, it is the boys' intention to spread the concept to the whole school, as they get older. This very impressive scheme, presented to inspectors with confidence and assurance, is but one example of the maturity of students that manifests itself in many ways. Sixth formers, for instance, reached the finals of the national debating competition and Mock Trial event.

As a Language College, the school is very keen to expand its international dimension. The support it gives, both financial and as a stimulus, to visits such as to Beth Shalom and the Somme, as well as the connections established through the Comenius project, bring great benefit to students in broadening their horizons and supporting spiritual development. Teachers build very well on these visits in bringing learning more alive for the students.

Leadership and management are good, and as the senior leadership has established itself over the last couple of years it has turned its attention from actual results to the progress students make. An early discovery was that although on the surface students appeared to be performing appropriately for their age many were in fact capable of doing much better. Action taken to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, which is now good overall, is proving effective. There are indications from 'forensic analysis' (the school's term) of 2006 results and tracking of students in school that standards and achievement are now rising. In the sixth form, where the rate of improvement has been more rapid, standards are above average. Elsewhere in the school standards are broadly average but improving, though all students are now achieving well. Importantly, the school has made the connection between attendance and achievement and can already see how the improvement of one affects the other. Two groups of students are at present under the spotlight, WIGs (Wath Improvement Grades) and BAGs (Boys' Achievement Group). Speaking to inspectors, some of these students were wholeheartedly appreciative of the school's efforts to help them reach their potential, adding, 'the target you're given isn't guaranteed: you have to work as

well'. A small group of students benefit from the school's long-standing relationship with local training and further education providers and these students regularly gain accreditation in life skills that lead to employment.

Teaching is responding well to the need to make lessons interesting and relevant and results in students learning at a faster pace. The school was concerned that some younger students, in a survey carried out last year, said lessons were 'boring'. Although the school is now much better equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, some departments do not yet have sufficient technology to allow them to develop their teaching using the most interactive methods. Teachers use computers, particularly electronic whiteboards, to add vitality and clarity to learning but the school is aware that it is as yet only scratching the surface of a potentially powerful and exciting learning tool.

The headteacher has carefully and systematically reviewed all aspects of the school's performance. In implementing change, she has maintained stability at the same time as recognising and developing the capability of all staff and students. Attention is now focused on strengthening the central leadership team so that the school can continue to progress at such a rapid pace of improvement. The school recognises more can be done to improve achievement further and to strengthen the way performance is checked on so that agreed policies are carried out and result in discernible improvement in every lesson. The good practice of the most effective middle leaders, already evident in improved examination results, is being shared and developed across all middle managers.

The governing body has been a rock during the period of change, led by the chair of the governors who is passionate about the success of the school and community. The new building has added massively to the improved ethos in the school and resources are deployed efficiently to give good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students speak highly of the good advice and guidance they receive on entry to the sixth form and also when they are considering opportunities for employment and for further and higher education. They are more than willing, in their words, 'to put something back' and spend considerable time mentoring younger students and helping to raise their confidence and self-esteem.

Teaching is challenging and as a result students achieve well to reach standards overall that are above the national average. About half the students gain the highest grades, A and B grade, a significant accomplishment. Students start in the sixth form with broadly average standards. Increasingly consistent and challenging teaching, as well as skilled guidance for learning, leads to testing targets at AS and A level being exceeded. Most students stay on to complete their courses and progress to degree courses at higher education.

Leadership and management are good, evaluate performance accurately and routinely and are concerned to increase the number of vocational courses in order to meet the needs of their students more closely.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the use of ICT across the whole school to improve teaching and learning in order to raise achievement.
- Bring consistency to the central leadership team through the sharing of good practice in monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the school's performance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The standards of students when they enter in Year 7 are broadly average. They make good progress to build on their knowledge and understanding, and though results were average in 2005 standards seen in school now are higher than that. Well targeted interventions, coupled with successful use of data, are leading to good achievement and rapid progress in Years 7 to 9. The performance of boys in mathematics and science now surpasses that of girls.

In Years 10 and 11 students continue to make good progress and in 2006 GCSE results were close to average and exceeded challenging targets. As in Key Stage 3 standards in school now are also rising. The school is aware of, and is working on, the need to improve the performance of average and lower ability students, and boys, especially in mathematics and English. Facilities for ICT have improved impressively since the previous inspection but as yet too little use is made of ICT by students to enhance the quality of their work. The school's specialist status has had a wide impact on student progress, particularly through the almost universal take up of modern foreign languages in Key Stage 4. The achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also good and in line with other students, although individuals among the most vulnerable Year 9 students often achieve exceptionally well.

Sixth formers rise to the high expectations that teachers have of them, respond positively to the good teaching they receive and achieve well across both years to reach above average standards by the time they leave.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Underpinning students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a range of charitable giving, from local to international, that demonstrates the concern students have for others. During the preparation for the move to the new building, the school council was active in its campaign to ensure that healthy options were on

offer in Le Rendezvous, the French-style school restaurant. As part of their drive for a healthier lifestyle, members of the council spoke to inspectors of the importance of exercise, adding with pride some of the details of their successes in the field of sport. Although a small number of parents reported to inspectors that they did not agree that behaviour in the school is good, during the inspection students behaved well in lessons, displaying a very mature attitude to visitors. The school has signed up to a national programme to improve behaviour, the success of which is already bearing fruit in improved attendance and punctuality. Students develop well during their time at Wath and it is therefore no surprise that almost all leave at 16 or 18 to go on to the next stage of education, training or into employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good quality teaching throughout the school increasingly reflects the school's recipe for, and emphasis on, learning. Behaviour is well managed and classrooms are calm and productive places. The most confident teaching encourages talk and collaborative work, including enabling students to act as critical 'examiners' of each other's work, though this is not yet a consistent feature in all lessons. Lessons are often engaging because academic learning leads to tasks that require students to apply what they know, though the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool is not sufficiently well developed to enliven lessons and promote greater independence in learning. Good subject knowledge, particularly in the sixth form, and the focused use of assessment data ensure that lessons have a clear sense of purpose. Many teachers successfully break lesson aims down into bite-sized chunks of learning that provide well for students' differing abilities, speeding up learning and helping all to achieve well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Extensive take up of modern foreign languages and increasing numbers of students following vocational courses in Key Stage 4 are the major characteristics of the good curriculum, which meets the needs, interests and aspirations of students well. Language College status enriches learning opportunities across the school and helps to improve the literacy skills of low ability students in Years 7 and 8. In combination with the wide range of extra-curricular activities, sports events and outdoor education, it plays an important role in supporting students' personal development and in widening their horizons beyond the local community.

There is a good variety of academic courses on offer in the sixth form and the school is looking to broaden the curriculum by introducing more vocational courses into both Years 12 and 13.

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Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' academic and good personal development is well served by the caring attitudes of staff and fellow students, underpinned by policies and procedures to secure students' safety. Students have ready access to advice and support including from fellow students. Guidance for pupils' future options is thorough. The development of an Inclusion Faculty ensures that a cohesive approach is taken to supporting vulnerable students and to providing a 'one stop shop' for meeting students' needs. The close tracking of performance leads to a range of targeted interventions that in turn lead to improved performance, for example for some underachieving boys. Regular student review days help focus the attention of staff, students and parents into identifying the next steps for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

An unquestionable commitment to improving the school drives the work of the leadership team, who have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. A range of factors has helped the school improve in a number of significant areas over recent years, the impact of which is most obvious in rising standards, the re-designation of specialist Language College status and the move to the new building, which has had a major impact on all aspects of the school's work.

The school's sixth form is well led and managed, enabling the growing number of students to make good progress. This gives the vast majority the right qualifications for entry into continuing education.

Governors show a tireless concern for improvement at all levels. They have a total commitment to raising standards of both students' personal development and academic achievement. These strengths help them to challenge the school effectively. Most of the issues identified at the last inspection have been tackled successfully, indicating that the school has good capacity to improve further.

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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	2
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	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	2	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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 making our two days at Wath Comprehensive so enjoyable and worthwhile and thank you to those of you who took the time to talk to us, both in lessons and at arranged times. We were all most impressed by your maturity and commitment to success. You said your school is a good one and we agree with you. It is quite difficult to pick out just a few things that make it good but here goes!

- The responsibility you take for everyone's welfare, especially through Bully Court and Safe Haven.
- The way achievement is improving and results are going up.
- The support and good example given by the sixth form to younger students.
- The cooperation between students and adults to ensure all of you get the support and challenge you need to realise your potential.
- The opportunities you have to visit different places such as Beth Shalom and the Somme.

We have asked your headteacher, governing body and staff to:

- make greater use of ICT to improve their teaching and your learning
- ensure that all leaders in the school use the wealth of information they have about how well you are doing in order to continue the improvements.

You of course can help in this by maintaining your loyalty to your community, continuing to work hard and to make your voice heard through the school council and taking care of your new building.