

The Lord Silkin School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123582
Local Authority	Telford and Wrekin
Inspection number	292721
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Frank Knowles

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	687
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pete Jones
Headteacher	John Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2001
School address	District Centre Stirchley Telford TF3 1FA
Telephone number	01952 387400
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Lord Silkin School is smaller than average and draws students from a disadvantaged area of south Telford. It also takes students with physical disabilities from a wider area. The majority of students come from White British backgrounds, with a few from other ethnic backgrounds.

The percentage of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is higher than the average nationally and the percentage eligible for free school meals is nearly double the national average. The turnover of students is also high, with nearly double the national percentage of students joining the school between the Year 7 starting date and the leaving date at the end of Year 11.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Lord Silkin School is a satisfactory school that has improved considerably in the last 18 months, mainly through the very good leadership of the headteacher. In that time he has brought a clear vision for the future and a strong focus on raising standards, although standards remained exceptionally low in 2006. Teaching and learning have improved and are satisfactory, but there is not enough good or better teaching to raise students' achievement above its current level. Given their starting points, however, students' achievement is now satisfactory.

The main improvements in the school have been in students' personal development and well-being, which are now good after a period of some difficulty. Students' behaviour has improved significantly, and the number of exclusions has fallen dramatically, with none since the beginning of this school year. Students' attitudes to their work are also good, and they enjoy coming to school. They recognise that bullying has been almost eliminated and know that any rare occurrences are dealt with speedily and effectively. The school's focus on work-related learning has meant students are now well prepared to make their way confidently in the world of work.

These improvements have arisen through the good care, guidance and support the school provides. The quality, quantity and coordination of support and guidance are good, including extensive involvement from outside agencies. The integration of students with physical disabilities into lessons and into the life of the school is outstanding. The recently improved and good curriculum, especially in its varied academic and vocational programmes in Year 10, is well matched to students' needs. As a result, the school is an exceptionally inclusive school, welcoming and supporting students whatever their background.

Teaching and learning have also improved in the last 18 months, although not as rapidly. Despite considerable improvements in the way teachers deal with any instances of misbehaviour in lessons, too many students are not challenged enough by the work they are set. As a result, the pace of learning is often slower than it could be. Students are good at expressing their opinions orally and engaging in discussion but do not have enough opportunities to learn actively in this way. This affects their motivation to learn, which they say is better where activities are more varied.

The recent improvements, which indicate good progress on the issues raised in the last inspection, show that the school is now well placed to tackle the necessary improvements in teaching. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, however, because of significant inconsistencies in subject leadership. Not enough use is made of data on the progress of students to identify strengths or areas where improvement is needed. The management of subjects varies too much and some good practice, especially in reviewing the quality of provision and how successful the subject is at raising standards, is not sufficiently widespread.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase levels of challenge in lessons and the pace of learning through more varied activities and more opportunities for students to engage in discussion.
- Make more consistent use of data on the progress of students in individual subjects to identify more quickly where improvements in achievement are needed.
- Ensure greater consistency among middle leaders in the evaluation of teaching and the performance of subjects to support more rapid improvement in achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students join the school with below average attainment overall. Few have reached high standards in tests at the end of primary school and a greater proportion of students than found nationally have learning difficulties and disabilities. Their reading skills are generally weaker than average. At the end of Year 9, results in national tests remain below average but have shown a gradual increase over several years which was sustained in 2006. The school's data on progress in more recent months show more significant gains and students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. To raise expectations of what they can achieve, the school has recently adopted a more challenging approach when it sets targets for students and this is supporting better progress.

Standards in examinations at the end of Year 11 have been exceptionally low for some years and dipped slightly in 2006 after the school's best results in 2005. Better teaching in Years 10 and 11 in the last year has seen students making faster progress, and the school's data shows a significant improvement in the number of students on target for GCSE success. The number of students on target to achieve five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics has shown a substantial increase. Students' achievement is now satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Among GCSE subjects, art is particularly strong and students' achievement is better in science, where teaching provides good levels of challenge, than in English and mathematics.

The good support that vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities receive means they make similar progress to other students and their achievement is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students show positive attitudes to their work. Their relationships with each other and their teachers are good so that they learn successfully as a whole class and in small groups. They enjoy lessons, and this is reflected in the much improved attendance, which is only just below the national average. The school's regular use of questionnaires also shows many more parents feel their children enjoy school more now and are making better progress. Students' behaviour is good, and in some lessons impeccable, and is significantly better than at the time of the last inspection. Students respond well to the help given in the Student Support Centre and through the Behavioural Improvement Programme. Students feel safe in school and, in lessons such as science and technology, they show awareness of the need for safe practices. They enjoy the responsibility they are given through the school council to be involved in debate about plans for the future, for example about the proposed house system.

Students appreciate the value of healthy eating and exercise, and two-thirds of them walk to school. They like the greater choice of food at lunchtime and the easy accessibility of water. Members of the school council commented that they felt this change had also helped to improve behaviour. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good in all four aspects, and their spiritual development has improved significantly since the last inspection. There is a clear sense of community, seen in the many charities students collect for, in their involvement in the annual Christmas party for the elderly and the work of groups like the Eco Group, which performs at primary school assemblies. Students gain considerably from their two weeks work experience in Year 10 which, they say, teaches them so much about the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school has used well targeted professional development to improve teaching and learning, with some success. However, inconsistencies in teaching, across and within subjects, have yet to be eliminated. Although it is satisfactory overall, not enough teaching is good or better.

Typically, lessons are structured carefully and managed effectively. Teachers explain clearly what they expect students to achieve and lessons have a purposeful working atmosphere. Relationships are good and teachers use praise to encourage students to achieve their best. Students behave well, show a readiness to work, concentrate, enjoy what they are doing and make satisfactory progress. Better teaching additionally combines a variety of motivating activities, demanding work and a brisk pace. Teachers ensure students know at what standard they are working and what they need to do to improve. They encourage students to express opinions, to discuss and explain what they are doing and to challenge others' views. Students respond well with articulate, well developed comments. Teachers check students' progress frequently during the lesson, ensuring that they and their students know what has been learned.

Satisfactory teaching typically has a slower pace of work, often where teachers talk too much and do not involve students actively. Students then lose interest, their concentration is reduced and they make slower progress. Some teaching does not provide enough challenge for the most able students. Occasionally off-task chatter is not quelled quickly enough.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

A good range of courses and activities enriches the lives of students. In Years 10 and 11, the newly developed curriculum offers a good variety of academic and vocational programmes, although this has yet to have a full impact on achievement and standards. The curriculum is tailored to the individual needs of each student and is particularly effective in providing for vulnerable students and those who might otherwise be disaffected. An extensive choice of vocational courses reflects the school's good partnerships with other colleges. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) has improved since the last inspection. Students have good opportunities to learn how to keep healthy and stay safe. They appreciate the good range of sports and other activities that are available and take good advantage of them. Residential trips to an outdoor activity centre and trips abroad contribute well to students' maturity and confidence. Work-related learning is good and includes a range of exciting enterprise activities as well as a valued work experience programme that closely matches the aspirations of the students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. One parent commented, 'The pastoral care of the school is fantastic.' The school has worked extremely hard and successfully to improve attendance and behaviour as an important first step in raising standards. The Behaviour Improvement Programme and the work of the Student Support Centre provide a high quality of care, guidance and support. Students with learning difficulties using the base gain much from the additional support they receive. Staff also create a secure environment in which vulnerable students can

learn and receive counselling. The fully integrated provision for the physically disabled students is outstanding. Arrangements for safeguarding students are excellent, with frequent checks in place to ensure procedures are carried out. Outside agencies give significant support to students' well-being and their work is expertly coordinated by the school. Learning managers use assessment information well to track students' progress and to set and review targets, but younger students are not always sure how they are getting on and what they need to do to improve. Teaching assistants offer good support in lessons and the use of students in Year 8 and above to mentor students in Year 7 who could benefit from extra help is successful. Students welcome the very good careers advice and guidance they receive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

A thoughtful and coherent approach among senior managers to the school's development has brought about significant improvements in several areas, but inconsistencies in subject leadership mean that, overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. The commitment of subject leaders is good and they welcome the way they have been involved in the school's plans for development. Their use of the available data on students' progress to identify potential underachievement is inconsistent, however. This means it is harder for senior managers to challenge subject leaders to bring about improvements in teaching and standards and to provide support where it is needed. The quality of reviews carried out by subject leaders also varies too much, with too much descriptive material and not enough evaluation of teaching and learning, or of how well students achieve. This makes it harder for the school to judge how much improvement has come about through its actions. Nevertheless, senior managers have a clear view from their own work of the most important areas that need improvement, such as teaching and learning.

Strategic planning is very good, with all staff and governors recently involved in setting out a new vision for the school. Staff recognise how their views are taken into account by senior managers as the school moves forward. Team leaders at all levels welcome the level of responsibility they are given. All this comes about mainly through the skills and experience of the headteacher, whose success in building staff teams and improving staff morale is outstanding. The governance of the school is good. Governors have extensive involvement with the school and focus strongly on acting as critical friends, questioning and challenging staff where needed and providing good support for the school's development. Forward planning of the school's finances is good with a clear long-term plan based on secure educational principles. Resource deployment is good and has supported improvement well but, given the students' current levels of achievement, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

The school has a strong focus on ensuring all its students are equally able to learn effectively, no matter what their personal circumstances, learning difficulties or disabilities, and is very successful in promoting equality of opportunity. In support of this philosophy, it makes outstanding use of an unusually wide range of services from outside the school, for example in the multi-agency Swan Centre and to provide vocational courses.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

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	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	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly when we inspected your school. We spoke with a good number of you in lessons, between lessons and in groups, and we valued the contributions you all made to the inspection. We were particularly impressed by the way you expressed your views openly, clearly and enthusiastically.

At the end of the inspection, we decided that yours is a satisfactory school and one that has improved a lot in the last 18 months. You told us that behaviour has improved recently. We agree and think it is now good. This is one of the most important improvements to the school as better behaviour allows all of you to enjoy lessons more and make better progress. You also told us that there is very little bullying, and we were glad to hear that when it does happen, it is dealt with firmly by staff.

The school has several other good points, such as the improved curriculum, and especially the range of courses you choose from for Year 10. Staff are good at helping you when you need it, especially those of you who use the Student Support Centre and the SEN base. The school also works exceptionally well with other organisations to give you specialist help such as careers guidance and, when you need it, counselling. The senior staff work well together to make the school run smoothly, and you will not be surprised to hear that we feel your headteacher has done a very good job in getting everyone to work together well.

- We have asked the headteacher and staff to do more in three important areas
- Give you more challenging work and interesting activities in lessons that involve you in discussions so that you make faster progress in learning.
- Make better use of your assessment results during the year to see which groups are falling behind so that more help can be given.
- Improve the way they assess how well each subject is doing, so that changes can be brought in where needed.

We expect the school to get even better in the next few months, and hope you will all do what you can to make sure everyone is able to learn in a calm, safe and enjoyable atmosphere. On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you every success in the future.