

The West Bridgford School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122859
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Inspection number	302831
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2007
Reporting inspector	David Martin HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1427
6th form	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Boothroyd
Headteacher	Mr R McDonough
Date of previous school inspection	26 January 2004
School address	Loughborough Road West Bridgford Nottingham NG2 7FA
Telephone number	0115 9744488
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Age group	11–19
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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

This school serves a mixed but largely advantaged catchment area of the county to the south of the City of Nottingham. A small proportion of students are drawn from a relatively disadvantaged area of the city. Free school meals figures are low as are other indicators of social deprivation. The student population is drawn predominantly from white British backgrounds, although there is a rich mix of students from other cultural heritages who make up some 20% of the population, a figure just above the average. This includes an average proportion of students who do not have English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is much lower than the national average, and the proportion with statements is below average. The school is larger than the average secondary school.

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 and improving school. The appointment of a new headteacher has brought a renewed impetus to school improvement. A clear vision for the school has already been partly realised through gaining specialist technology and Foundation status. There is also now an entrepreneurial approach to seeking additional funding which is being used to improve opportunities for learners. The headteacher is ably supported by a strong leadership team and an active group of governors in making these changes. There is undoubtedly huge potential and a good capacity to improve further. The school offers good value for money.

In less than two years, major gains have been seen in three main areas. The first of these is in improvements to the learning environment, particularly the increased provision for information and communication technology (ICT). This is making a substantial impact on teaching in many classrooms and has improved the potential for the school to move towards its goal of more personalised learning for students. The second area of impact is in a revised curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4 and currently operational in Year 10. This gives students far greater choice and flexibility; students were quick to praise these changes in our conversations with them. It includes an appropriate range of vocational courses and is tailored more to their expressed needs and aspirations. As a result of these changes, assessment information indicates that in 2008 there is likely to be a significant improvement on what are already high GCSE results. The third aspect that has improved very quickly is the use of data and assessment information. From a low starting point, the school is now rich in data about students' performance. More importantly, this is being used very effectively by staff to track progress and to intervene and offer additional support where there is any danger of individuals falling behind.

The school knows from effective self-evaluation that it still has further to travel in terms of some of its objectives and priorities. In many cases this is because the issues are classroom based and take longer to embed in practice. Teaching is generally good, and sometimes outstanding. However, practice is presently too inconsistent. The school has recognised this and has plans to improve all teaching through the coaching of staff by the most skilful practitioners. Inspectors agree with this priority and emphasise the need for an active involvement of students in all lessons so that they take responsibility for their own learning. In the best lessons, they show that they are more than capable of doing so. Linked to this is a need to make marking and homework more consistently good. Feedback is not always diagnostic to help students understand their next steps in learning.

Parents/carers and students alike identified these same strengths and areas for improvement in their feedback to the inspection team. Some parents expressed concern about the pace of change and whether communication and consultation was always effective, but the great majority clearly support and appreciate the quality of education and care that their children receive.

Standards are very high in the school, but the improvements mentioned are already showing signs of building further on what are already commendable examination results. The underachievement in English at Key Stage 3 over the last couple of years has been addressed vigorously and shortcomings in practice changed. The personal development of students is impressive and a particular strength of the school. This is particularly the case as they move through the school into older age groups.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school provides a good education for its sixth form students. Students make good progress in their studies and achieve standards above the national average in Advanced level examinations. All students complete the courses they set out on, both in Year 12 and in Year 13. Almost all go on to higher education.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They enjoy their time in the sixth form and make an excellent contribution to school life through the many opportunities available for them to assume responsibility. They help younger students, for instance by sport coaching, reading support, in ICT clubs and on residential experiences. They lead the School Council and do valuable work as peer mentors. Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Teachers give very good advice to students on their choice of courses in the sixth form. The guidance that students receive on progression to higher education is highly effective. Students appreciate the excellent individual care and academic guidance given by their teachers.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and transmit their own enthusiasm to their students. Many use skilful questioning techniques to encourage students to think hard and to express their ideas well. Some teachers showed an imaginative approach to revision lessons during the inspection. The curriculum is good. It meets the needs of all the students who stay on in the sixth form. The school offers a wide range of advanced level courses, enriched considerably by visits and fieldwork. Further enrichment is provided by the general studies programme, which makes a valuable contribution to students' personal development and all-round education. Although the school has plans to improve private study facilities, they remain inadequate at present.

The sixth form is well led and managed. Robust systems of self-evaluation are in place. Leaders have clear priorities for the further development of this already successful provision. The sixth form has a good reputation locally, and its popularity is reflected in the increasing numbers of students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make teaching and learning more consistent across the school by finding opportunities to disseminate best practice, thereby improving students' involvement in their learning.
- Make assessment and marking practice more consistent across the school in order to give better feedback to students on their progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The prior attainment of pupils on entry to the school is well above average and particularly high in the present Year 9 and 10 cohorts.

In 2006 attainment at Key Stage 3 was exceptionally high overall and in mathematics and science, but only broadly average in English. This reflects the trend over recent years, with mathematics and science maintaining a rising trend and with English falling towards the national average. Progress made by students from their starting points in 2006 was broadly average in mathematics and science but weak in English. Current progress, however, is good in all subjects

and indicates that the school is on course to achieve its targets. This would improve achievement overall but particularly in English at Key Stage 3.

Attainment at Key Stage 4 is good. Most indicators are well above average and are exceptionally high in some instances. Progress at Key Stage 4 in 2006 was above average overall and good in English. All groups of students make similarly good progress. Reliable assessment information indicates a significant increase in results expected this year and a marked increase for the current Year 10 cohort, with much stronger progress.

Attainment in the sixth form shows performance above the national average at A and AS levels. The progress made, as shown by value added scores, is also above average. Internal analysis of current Year 13 and assessment information for Year 12 indicates that progress from students' starting points is good.

Targets have been modest in recent years. However, these have been revised in the light of assessment information and future targets are more ambitious.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students develop good personal skills and they mostly enjoy their school lives. Because the school takes a positive stance, students' attendance is better than the national average, and students arrive at school and in lessons punctually. Their generally friendly and cooperative behaviour around the school, at break times and in the dining area is not always reflected in all lessons. Some teaching is not engaging enough to retain students' attention, and they can occasionally become restless and inattentive.

Because there is very little bullying, students say that they feel safe. They are confident that they could tell a member of staff if they did have any difficulties, and that appropriate action would be taken. Students know how to live a healthy lifestyle, through a very good mix of physical education activities, imaginative out-of-school opportunities, and strong encouragement to eat and drink sensibly. Students develop well in their social, moral and cultural awareness, but their spiritual development lacks a strong foundation. Although some visitors, and lessons in the creative and humanities subjects sometimes bring a valuable spiritual or uplifting aspect, assemblies frequently do not.

Students contribute outstandingly well to their own in-school community, the local area, and the wider world. This might be through, for instance, helping younger, slower readers, acting as sports leaders in local primary schools, or assisting schools as far abroad as Bosnia and Rwanda. Students develop good skills for their future lives through solid progress in the main school subjects, as well as in their awareness of careers options and what paid employment really demands and involves.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, but there is a gap between the outstanding practice seen in some classrooms and that seen in other lessons. Teachers have very good subject

knowledge and many plan their lessons thoroughly to ensure a wide range of activities and learning experiences for all students. ICT is increasingly used as an effective tool for teaching and resources are appropriate to support learning. As there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, the school is rightly focusing on professional training and coaching. Expectations for students' progress are higher as a result. Improved and increasingly robust use of data means that both staff and students know how well students are doing.

In question and answer sessions, students show considerable maturity in their responses, particularly when they are challenged to extend their thinking by their teachers. However, teachers do not always consider ways to challenge more able students to make rapid progress. The best lessons have clear learning objectives that involve students in what they will be learning and help them make good progress. These objectives are then reviewed and learning consolidated at the end of lessons. Teachers sometimes place more emphasis on what students are going to do rather than what they are going to learn. In these circumstances learning is less successful.

Relationships are usually very good and classrooms are managed effectively. Where lessons are interesting and engaging, students behave very well. Students enjoy the opportunity to try a range of learning methods such as group and pair work.

Marking is inconsistent. At its best it tells students how to improve but sometimes does not provide enough information for them. They are not always given the opportunity to act on their teachers' advice. Homework is also variable in quality.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. It meets all statutory requirements, fulfils the needs and aspirations of students of all abilities both in the main school and in the sixth form, and promotes achievement effectively.

Since the previous inspection the curriculum has improved considerably. The school's teaching time has been increased to twenty-five hours. All pupils now receive two hours of PE each week, and drama is now taught throughout Years 7–9. Reflecting the school's technology college status, the use of ICT has greatly increased.

A strength of the curriculum is its flexibility. In response to pupils' requests, an increasing number of vocational options can be taken along with academic subjects. Students with particular requirements are provided with a specially adapted timetable. There is good provision outside school for students who are gifted and talented, but not all lessons are planned to include a suitably high level of challenge. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those for whom English is not their first language, are provided with carefully co-ordinated learning support. In partnership with other institutions, the school has created effective work related learning programmes for a small number of students for whom the standard curriculum is not appropriate. Along with a well-organised programme of careers education and relevant work experience, the curriculum ensures that students are properly prepared for their future working lives.

There are, however, a number of subjects where students are taught by more than one teacher, and there is a significant amount of part-time teaching, which for some classes creates difficulties for the continuity of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's provision for students' care, guidance and support is good. Students are well safeguarded through strong protection systems that fully meet current requirements. Staff are well trained, and students know they can seek help and advice if needed. A strong personal and social curriculum is very well supported by regular tutorial periods. These successfully guide students and set realistically high expectations for their behaviour in different situations in school and beyond.

Many pupils sing the praises of staff and outside agencies who have made them aware of possible subject options or vocational pathways at all stages of their school careers. They value the advice and support greatly. Teachers make good use of assessment information that is gathered as students develop through the school. The data concerns academic progress, as well as personal development and behaviour. If students are struggling with some aspect of their learning, they are very capably assisted by well-trained support staff in some lessons, or within a unit known as the Learning Centre. Here, staff with good experience and expertise help students with learning difficulties and disabilities, or poor attenders, or those who do not have English as their home language. Their success is seen in, for example, greatly improved attendance, much better behaviour, completed work projects, good signing skills by hearing impaired students, or higher assessment and exam grades.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has provided fresh impetus to school improvement in the last two years. He has presented an excellent vision and strategic direction for the future development of the school and clear, concise development planning to steer priorities for improvement. He is ably supported by an effective, energetic senior team who bring complementary skills to leadership and management. The management style is one that encourages initiative and supports change. As a consequence, middle managers feel increasingly empowered to lead developments in their own areas. They are now driving forward improvements and most staff are fully committed to change. Recent appointments have further strengthened an experienced staff body.

The school now has a robust system of quality assurance and, as a result, identifies strengths and areas for development in its self-assessment. It therefore has good capacity for further improvement. Links with other providers are now good and have improved the reputation of the school within the community.

The school has achieved Foundation and specialist technology college status. Together with an entrepreneurial approach to accessing additional funding, this has had a very positive effect on the learning environment for students, particularly in the improvement in ICT resources. Financial management is tightly controlled and the school has clear financial planning to underpin its development priorities.

Governors are well informed and have a good range of expertise, skills and experience. They have an effective committee structure, are linked to school development priorities and hold managers effectively to account.

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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	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	2	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	1	
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?	2	1

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?	2	2
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

3 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of West Bridgford School, Nottingham NG2 7FA

Your school was recently inspected and this letter tells you what we found on our visit. Firstly, however, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your friendliness and helpful comments. Yours is a good school, and you will be interested to know that we agreed with your views of its strengths and what might be improved. These are the particular improvements that you noted since the current headteacher came to the school:

- The improvements made to the classrooms and the general environment. This includes the increase in the availability of computers and electronic whiteboards that make lessons far more interesting for you all.
- The good and improved curriculum choices and opportunities offered throughout the school, but particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.
- The better use of assessment information to help you to know how well you are doing and to target extra support and help when it is needed.

The greatest strength of the school is the care, guidance and support offered by all adults. As a result of this and of your mature attitude to learning, you develop into articulate, independent and caring learners as you move through the school. We could see this clearly in the many ways you care for each other, the community and wider issues, for example through your excellent charity work. The School Council and all those who spoke to inspectors impressed us with their openness and maturity. I would particularly like to mention the Sixth Form students. We agree that the school has got the balance right between caring for and supporting you, and allowing you to become independent, responsible adults. You provide excellent role models for younger students and benefit from your involvement in and leadership of activities within the school community. There are always some aspects of a school that can be improved further. We have asked the headteacher to take steps to share the best practice seen in teaching so that you are actively involved in all lessons and encouraged to take responsibility for your own learning. In this way, teaching, assessment and marking practice will be more consistent so that you are given clear feedback to help you all to make the best progress that you can.

Thank you once again for making us feel so welcome.

Yours sincerely

David Martin HMI