

Colton Hills Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104395
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	308591
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Marion Thompson

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	754
6th form	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Phil Lambert
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2004
School address	Jeremy Road Goldthorn Park Wolverhampton WV4 5DG
Telephone number	01902 558420
Fax number	01902 558421

Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized secondary school with a sixth form. Pupils come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, but the majority of pupils are of Indian heritage. A small minority of pupils in every year group is at the early stages of learning English. A slightly larger proportion of pupils than normal leave and join the school during the year. On entry to the school, standards are below average and are well below for older pupils. Language development is an area of particular weakness. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than is usually found. The school has provision for a small number of pupils who have physical disabilities. A high proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The school became a specialist language college in July 2006. The headteacher has been in post a few weeks, following the retirement of the previous headteacher.

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 provides a satisfactory standard of education, which is improving rapidly. In Years 7 to 11, standards are well below average, but rising quickly. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory, taking into account their starting points and prior experiences. For much of the past two years the school has had serious, prolonged staffing difficulties and pupils made considerably less progress than expected. Staffing problems are now resolved. GCSE results in 2007, and to a lesser extent, results in national tests in Year 9, show that the school has already begun to reverse previous underachievement. Nevertheless, much ground remains to be made up, a major challenge for the school. Standards remain too low in some areas, especially in science in Key Stage 3 and in mathematics throughout the school. Provision in the sixth form is good and students progress well in their courses.

Sound and improving teaching and pupils' good personal development are major contributory factors to recent improvements. Teaching has a number of important strengths, for example the good relationships between teachers and their pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning, behave well and apply themselves well to their work. Too often, however, the level of challenge presented to pupils is modest and there are insufficient opportunities to work independently. Guidance to pupils on how to improve their work through feedback in class and marking is getting better, but is still too inconsistent. Whilst still too low, attendance is rising, especially amongst vulnerable pupils in Key Stage 4. This is because the curriculum more closely matches their needs and aspirations. However, despite considerable efforts by the school, a small but declining number of pupils still do not attend regularly.

Leadership and management are sound. Leaders and managers at all levels are well aware of the need to increase the rate of progress so that pupils make up lost ground. The recently appointed headteacher provides a strong lead, based on an accurate assessment of the work of the school. Planning is focused on improving achievement and raising aspirations. However, targets set for individual pupils currently lack challenge and do not raise pupils' expectations of what they can achieve. Subject leaders have an increasingly clear grasp of how to improve achievement within their subject areas. Governors provide sound support and challenge for the school. Language specialist status has had a positive impact on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school and has improved provision for languages for the school and wider community. The school has sound capacity to drive further improvements.

Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures that the school functions well as a diverse and harmonious community. Despite the concerns voiced by a small number of parents, good systems are in place to ensure pupils are safe and secure. Pupils feel there is an adult to turn to if they have a problem. They have a sound awareness of how to stay healthy and make a good contribution to school and the wider community. By Year 11, their good social skills and satisfactory achievement in basic skills prepare them adequately for the future.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

In the sixth form, the standard of education is good. Students make good progress, reaching broadly average standards from below average starting points. Past staffing difficulties in science led to unacceptably low results in 2007 but students are now making good progress.

Students have very positive attitudes and sustain their concentration for long periods of time, mainly because teaching is good. Despite this, occasionally teachers do not engage students enough in discussion and probe their understanding. Teachers monitor students' progress well and give clear advice and guidance on how to improve their work further. This recently reviewed system has begun to have a positive impact on progress. Students appreciate the school's support and the readiness of teachers to help them. The retention rate is high.

The school provides comprehensive guidance and advice to help students make informed choices about higher education and careers. The curriculum is satisfactory and broadened by effective collaboration with other schools. It includes extensive opportunities for students to improve their basic skills. The range of vocational courses and training on offer is fairly limited and plans to extend this provision are in place.

Students' personal development is good. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and the level of harmony and mutual support is extremely good. The sixth form is well managed with a clear view of the areas for improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in Years 7 to 11, especially in mathematics and in science in Key Stage 3, by making sure that work is consistently challenging.
- Improve the attendance of the small number of pupils who persistently miss school.
- Raise pupils' expectations by setting targets that are more challenging.
- Ensure marking and feedback in class provide clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their work.

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.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are well below average, which is lower than they ought to be, given pupils' below average starting points. This is because of underachievement over much of the past two years. This was caused by serious staffing difficulties, which are now resolved. Pupils' achievement is now satisfactory, standards have begun to rise and older pupils reach most of their modest targets. In 2007, results in GCSE examinations improved sharply, because extra support for underachieving pupils, parental involvement and more attention to coursework raised standards, especially in ICT, citizenship, religious education and business studies. Standards in English, mathematics and science, which were particularly affected by staffing difficulties, are now rising. However, there is still considerable catching up to do, especially in mathematics. The achievement of vulnerable pupils has improved because the curriculum they now follow motivates them to attend more regularly.

In Years 7 to 9, pupils make satisfactory progress. Standards have begun to rise, especially in English. Again, much catching up remains to be done, especially in science and mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress. Pupils at the early stages of learning English make good progress because of well-organised provision.

Standards in the sixth form are broadly average, and students make good progress from their below average starting points. This is because the quality of teaching is good .

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is demonstrated by the harmonious relationships within the diverse school community. Pupils and sixth form students develop a good understanding of multicultural issues through, for example, links with a school in Sri Lanka. Most pupils enjoy school, attend regularly and behave well. Their serious attitudes to work have contributed to their improved achievement. However, despite the school's best efforts, a small and diminishing minority persistently miss school. Overall, attendance is below average. Pupils feel safe and say that the few incidences of bullying are dealt with well. They make a good contribution to the life of the school and local community through sport and charitable events and by acting as school councillors and peer mentors. Pupils have a sound knowledge of how to stay fit and are actively encouraged to look after their health, but do not always do so in practice! Pupils develop valuable skills, understanding and insight into commerce and industry through, for example, enterprise days. By the time they reach Year 11 their good social skills and adequate achievement in basic skills are a sound preparation for the future. Sixth form students' academic and social skills prepare them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Sound and improving teaching has contributed to better achievement for pupils in Years 7 to 11. Good relationships and teachers' expertise in their subjects ensure that most pupils enjoy lessons and are keen to participate in learning. Pupil management is good, so most lessons are calm and orderly. Increasingly, the purpose of lessons is made clear to pupils, so that they can evaluate their progress. As a result of specialist school status, ICT is used effectively to enhance learning. Teachers are beginning to provide clear guidance, through feedback in class and marking, on what pupils need to do to improve, although, as yet, this is too inconsistent. Most lessons are conducted at a steady pace and pupils make sound progress. However, insufficient opportunities are provided for pupils to tackle challenging work on their own or to develop their ideas to a high level through incisive questioning. Parents voiced some concerns about the frequency and relevance of homework and inspectors found it was too inconsistent in quality. Teaching and learning in the sixth form consortium are good and students make good progress. Occasionally, opportunities to develop students' thinking through discussion are missed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The satisfactory curriculum in Years 7 to 13 adequately matches pupils' and sixth form students' needs. It is best in Years 10 and 11, because provision is more carefully planned to interest and

meet the aspirations of individual pupils, especially the most vulnerable. This has resulted in improved attendance and motivation. Vocational courses and training are somewhat limited in the sixth form and plans are in place to extend this provision. Collaboration with other schools effectively extends the choices open to students. Language college status provides the opportunity to learn a wide range of languages during school time and beyond. It also provides pupils with the opportunity to gain accreditation for the language skills they acquire in the community. Support for pupils who are at the early stages of learning English is good and they make rapid progress. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory. Pupils with physical disabilities integrate well into the school. However, opportunities for independent learning are too limited and lesson planning occasionally presents a modest level of challenge. The wide range of popular extra-curricular provision supports pupils' personal development well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, support and guidance are satisfactory overall. Highly committed staff, effective links with external agencies and effective school systems ensure that pupils' health, safety and well-being are well catered for. Social and emotional support for vulnerable pupils is particularly effective. The school works hard to improve attendance, which is below average, but rising. This is, in part, because liaison with families has improved. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive sound support and make satisfactory progress. Provision for pupils at the early stages of learning English is good and they make rapid gains. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and the school intervenes successfully to offer additional support. Pupils do not always receive good quality advice on how to do better through marking of their work or class discussion. Pupils' individual targets are modest and this does not raise their expectations of what they can achieve. Good advice is offered to pupils when choosing options for Year 10 and when considering what to do when they reach the age of 16 and beyond. All aspects of care, support and guidance in the sixth form are good. Recently reviewed guidance systems are beginning to have an impact on raising standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The newly arrived headteacher provides clear direction focused on ensuring that all pupils achieve as well as they can. He is promoting a team ethos within the newly configured senior team which provides him with sound support. Following its accurate evaluation of its provision, the school has developed a coherent set of agreed priorities that give sharp direction to the school's improvement. For example, the senior team has identified better use of assessment to set challenging targets for pupils to raise standards. Planning in the sixth form is good and is based on an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. Subject leadership is sound, although the quality of evaluation and planning is variable. Sharing of best practice is leading to rapid improvement. Governors meet their statutory responsibilities and provide a satisfactory level of support for the school.

The impact of the school's language specialist school status is satisfactory and improving. It has only recently gained this status, but there have been significant improvements in ICT resources, which are helping to improve pupils' progress, an increasing range of modern foreign languages and involvement of students in community activities.

Staffing is now stable after a prolonged period of serious staffing difficulties, which led to disruptions in pupils' learning. Attention is now on improving teaching and the curriculum. Standards have started to rise, especially in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and attendance is improving. The capacity to improve is sound and issues from the previous inspection have been addressed.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
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	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

23 September 2007

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Colton Hills Community School, Wolverhampton, WV4 5DG

- We really enjoyed being at the school. You were very polite and we appreciated the help you gave us. A number of your parents and carers wrote to us, so please discuss this letter with them. Your views were very positive, so you will not be surprised that we found that your school provides you with a satisfactory and improving education. The education provided in the sixth form is good. These are the main things we found out:
- You make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 11 and there are strong signs that this is improving. However, standards in mathematics in Years 7 to 11 and in science in Key Stage 3 could still be higher. Students in the sixth form make good progress.
- This improvement is as a result of more stable staffing and satisfactory and improving teaching. Your good behaviour and positive attitudes to your work also help. Sixth form teaching is good and sixth formers have mature attitudes to work.
- Most of you enjoy school and show respect for each other's cultures. You pay good attention to your own and other people's safety. You make a good contribution to the school and wider community.
- The programme the school offers in Years 10 and 11 interests and motivates you. The consortium arrangements widen choice in the sixth form.
- The school takes good care of you and helps develop your confidence.
- The headteacher and other staff are working very hard to ensure the school continues to improve.
- To improve things further, we have asked the school to:
 - help you achieve more in Years 7 to 11, especially in mathematics, and in science for younger pupils, by making sure work is consistently challenging
 - ensure that all pupils attend school regularly
 - set more challenging targets so that you achieve the best you can
 - make sure that marking and feedback in class give you good advice on how to improve your work.

We hope you will continue to enjoy school as much as you do now.

Best wishes

Marion Thompson Lead inspector

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Marion Thompson
Lead inspector