

Weobley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116952
Local Authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	312454
Inspection dates	20–21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Merchant

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	457
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tim Stiles
Headteacher	Susan Woodrow
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2005
School address	Burton Wood Weobley Hereford HR4 8ST
Telephone number	01544 318159
Fax number	01544 312 900

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much smaller than average and serves a widespread rural community. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is a little below average. The majority of pupils are White British and very few pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very high. The school has been designated a specialist school in languages and communication since March 2006. The school provides extensive before- and after-school community provision in addition to the taught timetable.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Weobley High School is a satisfactory school with some good features. It continues its steady journey of improvement and staff have succeeded in creating a school community in which pupils feel safe, valued and supported. Pupils are justifiably proud of their school. Good care, guidance and support are reflected in the way pupils grow in confidence during their time at school. 'I love it here and don't want to leave,' said one Year 11 pupil. Pupils get on well with each other and with their teachers, and there is a tangible atmosphere of mutual respect.

The headteacher has provided vision and commitment and has been the driving force for improving the school, placing high priority on pupils' personal development and well-being, which are good. She has striven to ensure that pupils thrive within a caring and safe, yet vibrant, environment. This is reflected in good behaviour, positive attitudes to learning and good relationships. Good links with the community are having a powerful impact on pupils' personal development. Through involvement in a range of activities such as the 'eco' project, in which pupils actively and eagerly participate in improving the local environment, they develop a sense of pride and concern for their community. The pupils' good spiritual, moral and social development permeates across the school, leading to a culture of respect and tolerance amongst pupils. However, the school rightly recognises that it does not prepare pupils well enough for living in a society of many faiths and cultures.

Standards overall are broadly average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and standards by Year 9 are above average, reversing the steady decline of previous years. This is because the school has made every effort to ensure that all pupils are supported and included, and has made good use of data to track their progress. Standards in Key Stage 4 are broadly average and pupils' progress is satisfactory. The progress of older pupils is slower because the targets they are set by their teachers do not always challenge them enough to ensure they make better-than-expected progress.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. The school's own view of the quality of its teaching is too generous because its monitoring of teaching has focused on what teachers do in lessons rather than on how well pupils learn. Pupils achieve best when they are engaged in a variety of stimulating activities that are planned to motivate them and meet their individual learning needs, and are given opportunities to assess progress. Pupils' progress slows when they have to listen for too long, the work lacks challenge, and they have too few opportunities for discussion and learning independently. The school acknowledges that it has to improve the consistency in the way that teachers interpret and act upon information about pupils' progress and target setting, particularly in Key Stage 4. Too often the marking of pupils' books is superficial and errors go unchecked.

The curriculum is good and meets the needs of pupils. Provision for out-of-hours learning is good, and this extends pupils' experiences and enhances their enjoyment and personal development. The school's specialist status as a languages and communications college is becoming increasingly more visible under very able direction, and it is starting to permeate the work across several areas of school life. For instance, it contributes tangibly to pupils' improved literacy skills.

Leadership and management, including the work of governors, is satisfactory. The quality of middle management is variable in terms of getting the best possible examination results in their subjects. The school's own evaluation overestimates the effectiveness of its performance.

This prevents the school from using its self-evaluation effectively to spot trends and focus remedial action. In particular, it does not always select targets that are challenging enough to ensure that pupils' progress is fast enough.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning consistently challenges and engages pupils and promotes independent learning.
- Improve achievement by the end of Year 11 by setting targets that consistently stretch and challenge pupils to do their best.
- Improve the quality of marking to ensure that all pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.

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

Pupils' attainment when they enter the school is broadly average but there are fewer higher-attaining and more lower-attaining pupils than is usual. All groups of pupils make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who make up a large proportion of the school, make similar progress to other groups of pupils. There is a stronger picture at Key Stage 3, where standards are significantly above average, rising sharply in the national tests in 2007 after a period of slow decline. Much of this improvement was due to the well-above-average results in science. Standards in mathematics and English are average, much as they have been over the past five years. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3, particularly in science, but make slower, although satisfactory, progress overall in Key Stage 4.

Reasons for the rise in standards at Key Stage 3 include the good use of data to track pupils' progress, well-organised procedures to identify pupils in danger of underachieving and effective strategies to support pupils, including strong use of learning mentors. These features are now beginning to be better employed in Key Stage 4. Standards at Key Stage 4 dropped in 2007, reflected in the GCSE examination results which were broadly average, largely because of the late arrival of a significant number of pupils whose prior attainment was below average. Also, at Key Stage 4, the targets set by teachers are not always sufficiently challenging to ensure all pupils make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good and makes a significant contribution to their progress in all areas of school life. Pupils develop into well-rounded and mature young citizens by the time they leave. The school stresses the importance of promoting pupils' personal development and well-being, which has led to the development of a vibrant, harmonious community. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good, and a calm, purposeful atmosphere exists in which they feel safe. Pupils are happy and responsible members of the school community. The school listens to its pupils through the school council and, as a result, improvements have been made to the uniform and cleanliness of the site.

Pupils clearly understand the benefits of healthy eating and their participation in sports and after-school clubs is good. Pupils' awareness of moral issues, such as respect for others and care in the community, is good. Pupils raise considerable sums for local and global charities, including the Mombasa Olympic Youth Organisation. Pupils engage well with European cultures, but their multicultural experiences, although satisfactory, are not as well developed. Attendance is good. It has improved appreciably since the last inspection because of the wide range of monitoring and intervention strategies. Most pupils enjoy life in school, finding it 'welcoming', and they relate well to adults. One group noted that 'lessons are enjoyable when we do practical work, but boring when teachers talk for long periods'. Pupils are developing satisfactory skills in preparation for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In many lessons, pupils are inspired to learn and they do so with confidence and pride, as teaching is lively, tasks and concepts are clearly explained, and activities are carefully designed to challenge the pupils to learn at a swift pace. Pupils' levels of enjoyment and motivation are high, as praise is used extensively to motivate them. Teachers take care to ensure that pupils know exactly what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve. Working relationships in these lessons are excellent. However, in a significant number of lessons, the teacher's desire to ensure that all pupils understand the work results in more direction by the teacher than is necessary. This is often at the expense of practical 'hands-on' learning which makes more demands on the pupils to be active and independent. As a result, pupils are over-reliant on their teachers in these lessons. The quality of marking across the school is erratic. Many pupils' exercise books go for long periods without being marked by the teacher; elsewhere, marking is superficial and errors go undetected. Too little advice is given to pupils on how they can improve their work further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good overall and is well designed to meet the needs of pupils. Provision at Key Stage 4 is good and improving. The range of vocational subjects is increasing, reinforced by effective collaboration with local colleges. This is one reason why pupils attend school regularly. Such links also contribute to the effective transition arrangements for pupils' education when they leave school. Pupils are starting to benefit from the opportunities offered by the school's specialist status as a language and communication college. Although this has not yet had a marked impact on standards across the school, pupils are gaining important and useful skills in communication. Pupils also benefit from additional opportunities offered by foreign residential visits and the increased use of technology and computers in modern foreign languages. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of enrichment activities, complemented by a varied and interesting calendar of activities offered through a well-coordinated extended schools programme. This reaches into and is strongly supported by the local community. Pupils are developing a strong social conscience as a result of the 'values' curriculum that is integral to the good provision for personal, social and health education and citizenship.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school takes good care of pupils so they develop in a secure environment. They quickly settle into the life of the school because there are good systems to help them transfer from primary school. Newly inducted pupils commented, 'Year 11 pupils were friendly and helpful, enabling us to settle quickly into the school'. Incidents of bullying and racism are low and dealt with quickly and amicably. Pastoral care arrangements are good, with appropriate reporting lines from tutors to senior managers. A particular strength of the provision is the care and guidance provided for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who achieve as well as other pupils in the school. This is because of the good leadership of this provision and well-directed support from teaching assistants.

The systems for monitoring pupils' academic progress are well established, and the recently appointed learning coordinators track pupils' progress and identify areas of underachievement. These systems are particularly effective in science so that pupils achieve well in this subject. However, they are not applied consistently across all other subjects and year groups. As a result, some pupils do not always achieve as well as they should, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

Child protection procedures are clear and understood by staff. Effective procedures for health and safety and risk assessments ensure that pupils undertake activities safely. Pupils make informed choices on the various stages of study through good quality guidance and support, including some provided by other agencies. Work experience and the growing range of vocational courses enhance pupils' skills for their future working lives.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has effectively guided the school through a period of instability with strength and determination. She receives good support from enthusiastic senior leaders, who are strongly committed to developing a good school for pupils. The school has successfully overcome staffing and recruitment problems and is now developing the role of middle managers through a programme of professional development that draws on the strengths of existing staff. It is working hard to monitor and evaluate this training to ensure that its impact is felt in the classroom. The school is now introducing a planned system of evaluation and development that encompasses the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. However, the capacity of middle managers to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their subject areas accurately and to identify the specific areas for development is inconsistent. Governors know and support the school satisfactorily. They are now beginning to hold the school to account because of their developing skills in interrogating school information about achievement. There are effective links with primary and other secondary schools and very good links with external agencies. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and many pupils and parents commend the progress that the school has made in recent years. The school's capacity to improve further is satisfactory.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
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
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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
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

22 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Weobley High School, Weobley, Herefordshire HR4 8ST

We enjoyed visiting your school recently to inspect it. Thank you very much for making us feel welcome and for talking to us so frankly. We have now written our report and hope some of you will want to read it. This letter is addressed specifically to you and sums up what we think of Weobley High School.

We judge your school to be satisfactory with some good features. Most of you are making satisfactory progress, although the standard of work you produce in lessons does vary depending on the subject and teacher. Overall, standards are broadly average. The teaching in your school is mainly satisfactory. When teachers make the work interesting, get you involved in the lesson rather than sitting and listening, and make sure you know what is expected from you, you do well. In some lessons, though, you are unclear about what you are expected to do and as the level of challenge is too low you do not make as much progress as you should.

We believe that your teachers care about your personal development. You feel safe and well cared for, and you are confident that there are adults you can go to with problems. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good.

We have asked staff to do three things to improve the school further.

- Ensure that all teachers make sure that you are involved more actively in lessons and that the work challenges you consistently.
- Set you targets that consistently stretch and challenge you to do your best.
- Mark your books more carefully to help you know how well you are doing and how you can improve your work further.

Your headteacher and her staff have the capacity to continue to improve Weobley High School further and help you reach higher standards in your exams.

Good luck with your studies

Yours sincerely

Michael Merchant Lead inspector

Annex B



22 February 2008

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Michael Merchant
Lead inspector