

Big Wood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122844
Local Authority	City of Nottingham
Inspection number	314419
Inspection dates	25–26 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Lindsay Hebditch HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	734
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Harris
Headteacher	Mrs Bernadette Groves
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2005
School address	Bewcastle Road Warren Hill Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG5 9PJ
Telephone number	0115 9539323
Fax number	0115 9539321

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Big Wood School is an 11–16 mixed comprehensive school which largely draws its pupils from council estates on the northern rim of the City of Nottingham. It serves an area of serious social need. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is high and the number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need is nearly double the national average. The number of children in care is high. Some 16% of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage. The standards of pupils entering the school are below average. The school achieved specialist status in business and enterprise in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Big Wood School is a good and improving school which is very popular with pupils and their parents. Its calm, purposeful atmosphere immediately strikes visitors to the school. This is a significant achievement because many of the pupils lack stability and order in their lives outside of school. Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. She is ably supported by her strong and experienced leadership team and is greatly respected by staff and pupils alike. Improvement at Big Wood has been a real team effort.

Achievement and standards are good. Standards are below average but pupils make good progress at Key Stage 3. In 2007, progress in Key Stage 4 was unsatisfactory but the school's most recent data indicate that it has improved significantly this year. The school has identified that standards in Key Stage 4 require further improvement, particularly in mathematics. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress throughout the school. Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils understand how important good behaviour is to the smooth running of the school and for the most part behave well. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers mostly take good account of the wide range of pupils' individual needs in planning their lessons but sometimes pupils have insufficient opportunities to develop their own learning. Assessment is accurate but the marking of work varies in quality, sometimes making it difficult for pupils to understand what is expected of them. The curriculum is good and is well matched to pupils' needs and interests. There are effective arrangements for pupils to develop vocational skills associated with the school's business and enterprise specialism and good opportunities for pupils in Key Stage 4 to follow courses leading to vocational qualifications. The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support.

The school has correctly identified its strengths and areas where it could improve still further. Self-evaluation is self-critical, accurate and provides a reliable framework for planning. Value for money is good and the school has good capacity to improve still further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards at Key Stage 4, particularly in mathematics.
- Provide more opportunities in lessons for pupils to develop their own learning.
- Implement the school's marking policy consistently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of pupils enter the school with low self-esteem, below average levels of prior attainment and in particular very low standards of literacy. Results in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3 reveal that, although standards are below average, pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points. Progress in Key Stage 4 shows much greater variability. Although Key Stage 4 performance has improved since the last inspection, results in 2007, particularly in mathematics, were unsatisfactory. The number of pupils that gained five or more higher grade GCSE passes was significantly below the national figure and a relatively high proportion of pupils left the school with no qualifications at all. Test results for the current year show significant improvement and indicate that pupils have sustained their good progress from Key

Stage 3. The standard of pupils' work is satisfactory overall but pupils' art work on display throughout the school is of outstanding quality. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because the school has extremely effective systems for assessing their starting points and providing the learning support that they need. Pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds make similar progress to White British pupils. The school met nearly all of its targets for specialist status in 2007.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are polite, generally well behaved and have a positive approach to their work, although some find it difficult to manage homework effectively. They feel safe at school and say how much they enjoy it. Reported incidents of bullying are rare but if they occur they are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and the comprehensive personal, social and health education programme helps ensure that all pupils understand how to stay healthy and safe. Pupils appreciate the importance of a healthy lifestyle and welcome the improvements to the food in the school canteen. There are good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and many make an important contribution to the work of the school and the wider community by undertaking voluntary activities such as the neighbourhood gardening project. The student council is a strong forum for airing pupils' views and the school listens to and acts on what they have to say. For example, the school council has been consulted on the school's building programme. The school has worked hard to improve attendance to a satisfactory level but understands that it needs to continue to monitor attendance very carefully.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers understand that many pupils lack confidence in their own ability and that for some pupils very small gains in learning represent quite significant levels of achievement. In the best lessons teachers take good account of the wide range of pupils' individual needs and plan lessons skilfully to ensure that they are met, whilst maintaining a good pace to their lessons. Sometimes teachers overcompensate for the low starting points of pupils by providing too much explanation, thus depriving pupils of valuable opportunities to think for themselves and develop their oral and literacy skills. The school has a very clear understanding of which aspects of teaching require improvement and has developed a good programme of staff training, covering such important aspects as assessment for learning and developing differentiated learning schemes. This has led to a significant improvement in the teaching of mathematics this year.

Assessment is accurate but the rigour of marking varies within and between subjects, particularly in terms of the attention given to grammar and spelling. This makes it difficult for pupils to know what the expected standards are. Pupils do not always understand why they have been praised for some pieces of work yet are urged to do better in others.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and well matched to pupils' needs and interests. A strong focus on developing literacy and numeracy is at the heart of curriculum planning and is leading to a steady improvement in standards. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 offers an appropriate range of subjects as well as alternative provision for pupils with very low levels of prior attainment and for those who have difficulty in moderating their behaviour. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 provides pupils with good opportunities to develop their own individual learning programmes. There are effective arrangements for pupils to develop vocational skills associated with the school's business and enterprise specialism, helping them to improve their opportunities for future employment and economic well-being whilst achieving qualifications in programmes other than GCSE. Pupils value the broad range of enrichment activities and participation in organised sports is particularly good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and have been a significant factor in developing the inclusive ethos which is such a strong feature of the school whilst underpinning improvements in pupils' progress. Arrangements for the transition from primary school are extremely thorough and pupils settle in to their new school quickly and happily. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and well supported by the work of the achievement coordinators and form tutors. The need for any intervention is identified quickly and provided promptly. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive extremely effective support. The school works with an excellent network of external agencies to provide more specialised support when it is needed. Procedures for child protection and ensuring pupils' health and safety are secure. Pupils receive effective guidance when making career choices.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school has successfully addressed most of the areas for improvement identified in the previous report and has a good record of meeting its targets. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and provides a clear vision for the school, which centres on the need to improve the life chances of all pupils and the wider community in which they live. She is ably supported by her strong and experienced leadership team and enjoys the confidence of her staff. Although some inconsistency remains, middle leaders are developing rapidly. They are held highly accountable for their teams and the pupils in their care whilst receiving good guidance and support from their peers. Morale is high. Parents are full of praise for the school and value the hard work which staff put in to make it successful.

The school has robust procedures for self-evaluation and quality assurance and uses data effectively to analyse performance. The school's business and enterprise specialist status contributes to a wide range of initiatives that promote high quality care and help raise standards, particularly through effective partnerships with outside agencies and by enhancing the curriculum. The school promotes equality of opportunity effectively through the curriculum. Managers throughout the school monitor the performance of different groups of pupils carefully.

Governors visit school regularly and are very active in their leadership role. They are reflective and fully aware of the school's strengths and what it needs to do to improve. Governors provide good support and are prepared to challenge school managers if necessary. The school provides good value for money, targeting resources well to meet the diverse needs of its pupils.

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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?	2
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
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	2

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
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	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?	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
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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**

27 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Big Wood School, Warren Hill, Nottingham NG5 9PJ

Thank you very much for making us so welcome at your school. We enjoyed talking to you and watching you work. You clearly enjoy coming to school and appreciate all of the hard work that your teachers put in. In the lessons we saw you were working hard as well. Lots of your parents took the trouble to complete the questionnaires we sent out and I would be grateful if you could pass on our thanks to them for taking the trouble to reply. Your parents are as happy with the school as you are.

Your school is well led by the headteacher and she is keen to make it even better. I identified three things that I think would help.

- Improve the quality of work at Key Stage 4, particularly in mathematics.
- Provide more opportunities in lessons for you to develop your literacy.
- Implement the school's marking policy consistently.

Your continued good behaviour will support the school's efforts. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Well done!

Lindsay Hebditch

Her Majesty's Inspector