

Joseph Whitaker School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122866
Local Authority	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LA
Inspection number	314427
Inspection date	16 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Andrew Cook HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1248
6th form	179
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Christopher Barnfather
Headteacher	Mr John Loughton
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Warsop Lane Rainworth Mansfield Nottinghamshire NG21 0AG
Telephone number	01623792327
Fax number	01623792419

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following: students' achievement in mathematics, the effect of the specialist status on the school's overall effectiveness, the effectiveness of leadership and management in improving provision and the quality of education in the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, scrutiny of students' work, analysis of students' performance data, and interviews with students, the school's leaders and managers and the chair of governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. Inspectors agreed with some aspects of the school's self-evaluation but disagreed with others. Commentary has been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

The number of students that attend Joseph Whitaker School make it a larger than average secondary school. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is below average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those whose first language is believed not to be English. Students' attainment when they start in Year 7 is average.

The school became a Specialist Sports College in July 2004 and a Foundation School in November 2006. The school shares a joint use site with Newark and Sherwood District Council, who provide a leisure centre environment with sports centre, swimming pool and fitness rooms. The school has a range of awards including: Arts Mark Gold, Sports Mark Gold, Sports Partnership Mark, FA Charter Standard for Schools, Development Charter Status, FA Charter Standard for Holiday Programmes, Career Mark and Healthy Schools Award. Following the 2006 results the school was one of the most improved schools and awarded membership of the Specialist Schools and Academy Trust 'Most Improved Schools Club'.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with good features. The school's specialist sports college status is a considerable strength. Students achieve well in the specialist subjects of physical education and history; history is also linked to the specialist status. Many students gain GCSE A* to C grades in these subjects and targets are regularly exceeded. The school's improved standards in 2006 led to special recognition by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Achievement in the main school is satisfactory. Over the last three years the proportion of students gaining five GCSE A* to C passes has risen from below average to average in 2007. When taking into consideration students' starting points, students make satisfactory progress overall. In some subject areas, for example physical education, history and drama, students make good progress and standards are above average. In mathematics the proportion of students who achieve a GCSE A* to C pass is below the national average and students' progress in this subject, although satisfactory, is in the lowest 25% of schools nationally.

The school's specialist status contributes well to the quality of education that students receive. For example, the school has set up a 'Teaching and Learning Strategy Group' (TLG), an initiative to improve the quality of teaching and learning further. Since September 2007, there has been a more focused and vigorous approach in the way that this group works. Training has taken place and staff are taking on new strategies to boost achievement. In many ways it is early days and the good practice that is being developed has not yet been seen in test or exam results across the school or run long enough to be accurately evaluated. Teaching varies considerably in quality in the main school. Overall, it is satisfactory with good features and enables students to make satisfactory progress. Relationships are positive among students and teachers and, consequently, students behave well and have the confidence to seek help in lessons. Teachers plan lessons well, and share lesson objectives with students. Students who find learning difficult are well supported by teaching assistants to ensure they have access to the full curriculum and achieve well. Lessons usually run at a reasonably brisk pace and maintain students' interest and commitment. Some lessons lack the challenge to inspire students' interest. In these lessons, students lose interest and lack the enthusiasm to make good progress.

Students' personal development is good, as seen in their good behaviour and attitudes around school. Their moral and social development is good and their spiritual development is satisfactory. Students' understanding and adoption of healthy lifestyles is outstanding and reflects the impact of the school's specialist sports status. All students take at least two hours of physical education (PE) weekly and many get involved in the sport and dance extra-curricular activities. Attendance is satisfactory. Students have good opportunities to contribute to the school community through the school council and the high profile 'Red Shirt' team. Those students who wear a red shirt have taken part in a comprehensive leadership programme developed through the sports specialism. Students contribute well to the local community, for example, through musical productions and performances and to the wider community through raising money for charities and linking up with two schools in Africa. The satisfactory progress students make in their studies and their good personal development prepare students adequately for further education or employment.

The curriculum is satisfactory and has good features. It gives students an extensive range of opportunities, which support their learning and progress satisfactorily. Provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT is satisfactory. The Key Stage 4 curriculum gives every student the opportunity

to achieve and gain qualifications. For example, students who find the mainstream curriculum difficult to manage receive worthwhile alternative opportunities. Specialist status has enhanced the Key Stage 4 curriculum, and BTEC courses are already giving students a wider range of choice of both sport and other subjects, which better meet their learning needs and interests. The most talented students are identified and provided with challenging enrichment opportunities. Students' health and safety is well supported by the personal, social and health education (PHSE) curriculum and by sport and physical education. A good range of extra-curricular opportunities is available, and the take-up is good. A wide range of sports is available, and many students become involved in annual productions and in dance. Links with the community through sport, especially with primary partner schools, greatly enhance students' learning experience and improve standards in sport and physical education before students join Year 7.

The school provides a good level of care for its students. All necessary checks are made on staff. The school has good systems to make other safety checks and, when any issues arise, action is taken. The school works well with other agencies to support vulnerable students. Students speak confidently about how staff deal with any bullying or racist incidents. Provision through the student support centre and opportunities for students to receive counselling are also effective ways in which the school cares for students. The school is improving the way that it gives academic guidance to students. The quality of marking varies but there is evidence that the TLG is promoting good practice and influencing the work of other colleagues. Mentoring students to help them to achieve their best, holiday sessions to enable students to catch up with work and the withdrawal of study leave for Year 11 students, are some of the many whole-school initiatives that have grown from specialist status.

The effectiveness of leadership and management in raising achievement is satisfactory. The senior leadership group (SLG), led by the respected headteacher, has an accurate view of the students' achievement but has not fully linked this to the impact of teaching and leadership and management. Past improvements in achievement demonstrate that leadership has the satisfactory capacity to increase further the effectiveness of the school. The school's specialism is well led and managed. Not only do sport and history achieve alongside the best performing subjects, but initiatives are assisting improvement more widely, both across the curriculum in school and in the community. Governors have worked with the SLG to evaluate the work of the school, which has led to an awareness of the satisfactory levels of achievement. Recently the governors have reorganised the way they work to best match the leadership structure of the school. This alignment has been an effective move and increased the opportunity for governors to challenge and support the school and to plan for the future.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards on A-level and AS-level courses are broadly average, but students achieve well given their standards on entry. Almost all complete the courses they begin. Most students choose to continue to higher education and gain the qualifications to do so. Students who follow intermediate-level courses also achieve well. Sixth formers are mature and responsible. Many take considerable responsibility for younger students and give them good support in their work, for example, in helping Year 7 students to improve their reading. Sixth formers undertake lunchtime supervision, and help to manage the social areas allocated to different year groups and are good role models for younger students. The quality of education is good. The teaching and learning are good. A good range of sixth form advanced courses is available, and the range

of lower level courses is expanding. An interesting range of extra-curricular activities is appreciated by students, many of whom seize the opportunities available. Leadership and management are effective in ensuring students are helpfully guided and supported to achieve well and make informed choices for the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' achievement in mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of good teaching in subject areas where achievement is only 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	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	2	

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	1	
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	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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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

17 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Joseph Whitaker School, Nottinghamshire, NG21 0AG

Thank you for being so helpful when we inspected your school. We were impressed by your good behaviour and positive attitudes in lessons. Those of you who met with us to talk about your school were very confident and able to share your views about the quality of education you receive.

We found that your school is satisfactory with good features. The progress you make is satisfactory. In some subjects, for example PE, history and drama, it is good. In mathematics and a number of other subjects it is only satisfactory. The specialism in PE and the work done in history are good features of your school. Many of you told us about the sports facilities and opportunities that are on offer. As a result of the focus your school has on sport and healthy lifestyles, you are making an excellent commitment to keeping fit and healthy.

What goes on in school helps you to develop good social skills, which results in your school being a community where you feel safe. There are good opportunities for you to take on responsibility, including those who have learnt leadership skills and earn the right to wear a 'Red Shirt'.

The headteacher and other senior leaders in your school continue to focus on improving the rate of progress you make in lessons. More lessons need to be good so that by the end of Year 11 your achievement is good or better.

We have asked your school to improve the progress you make in mathematics and ensure that more good lessons are taught in all subjects.

Best wishes

Andrew Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector