

Nether Stowe High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124409
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314922
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Davinder Dosanjh HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	856
6th form	132
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Southern
Headteacher	Barrie Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2005
School address	St Chad's Road Lichfield WS13 7NB
Telephone number	01543 263446
Fax number	01543 414602

Age group	11-18
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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

Nether Stowe is a smaller than average school situated near the centre of Lichfield. Local pupils come from a variety of areas, including the most disadvantaged and most advantaged wards of Staffordshire. Over 90% of pupils are from White British backgrounds, although a small number of minority ethnic groups are also represented at the school. A few pupils are bilingual and there is a small but increasing number of pupils who are Polish and speak no or little English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. In January 2007, the school opened an autistic unit at the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Nether Stowe is a satisfactory school with many good features. It is an inclusive school where behaviour is good and pupils are polite. Pupils comment on the good care and support they receive. Personal development is good. Pupils are actively involved in the work of the school council, and make useful improvements to the school environment, such as the paper waste recycling boxes introduced by the Eco group. Mentoring and buddying systems enable pupils to feel safe.

Achievement is satisfactory overall. At Key Stage 3, the pupils make good progress because strategies implemented by the school have made a real difference. Mathematics, in particular, has greatly improved. At Key Stage 4, the school showed a three-year improving trend in GCSE results until 2007, when results declined. While GCSE results remain below the national average, current progress shows that students are on course to do better. The school continues to use a number of intervention strategies, some of which are more successful than others.

The curriculum is broad and flexible, providing opportunities to study courses at the local college and in partnership with West Bromwich Albion Football Club. Pupils have many opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities particularly in music, drama and sports. The music group has taken part in festivals in France and Germany. Pupils are well cared for, including the most vulnerable. Partnerships with external agencies are good, ensuring a high level of support for pupils' well-being. Guidance is very effective and an increasingly number of pupils stay in education or training after Year 11.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The school has worked hard to improve teaching and this has been a key focus for the last few years. The school's robust system for monitoring teaching and learning has been used to identify where support is needed for specific subject areas. There is more consistency in the structure of lessons. Assessment has continued to improve across the school. However, some lessons lack a range of stimulating tasks and resources to cater for the full range of pupils' abilities.

The relentless drive of the headteacher has enabled the school to carry on the journey to improvement. He has very effectively managed the fall in student numbers at the school. Challenging targets are set for improvement and a great deal of success has been achieved at Key Stage 3. The headteacher is well supported by senior and middle managers. Middle managers are more accountable and have a greater focus on targeting underachievement. The school therefore shows a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards in the sixth form improved in 2007 and are good. Based on their starting points, students make satisfactory progress. The number of students who progress from Year 12 to 13 is good and shows an improving trend. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and appreciate the good care they receive. They act as good role models for young pupils by being house captains and taking part in peer mentoring. The sixth form is successful in raising student aspirations and 70% of students have progressed to higher education over the last two years. Students are confident and develop good information and communication technology (ICT) skills with the opportunity to have individual laptop computers. These are used very well in lessons by students to support their learning. The curriculum is satisfactory, but there are too

few opportunities to study vocational courses. The school recognises this and is planning to develop its provision. Teaching is good. Teachers target questions very effectively and the best lessons encourage pupils to develop as independent learners. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, based on very effective tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement at Key Stage 4 by ensuring intervention strategies are robust and show sufficient impact.
- Share good practice to ensure that more teaching is good or outstanding and that a range of stimulating tasks and resources cater for the full range of pupil abilities.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils' attainment on joining the school is broadly average. Pupils make good progress during Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics and satisfactory progress in science. Mathematics has improved significantly over the last few years. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have continued to rise and are now above the national average.

Progress at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. GCSE results had been improving for the previous three years but, in 2007, there was a decline in the proportion of pupils attaining five A*-C grades at GCSE and the school's targets were not met. Standards are below average. Mathematics shows an improving three-year trend but the progress made in English language is inconsistent and pupils underachieved in this subject in 2007. The gap between the performance of boys and girls is closing with boys' underachievement being targeted and showing some improvement in GCSE results. The school has used a range of successful interventions over recent years to improve the achievement of pupils but, in 2007, they did not have the same impact. These have been reviewed, evaluated and changes made to ensure extra support is appropriate. Current progress in lessons and school data indicate that pupils are now making at least satisfactory progress. Pupils are on track to meet challenging targets in 2008. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress.

In the sixth form, standards are good, with an improvement in pass rates and high grades in 2007 for both A and AS level courses. The pass rates for those students studying key skills in communication are also good. Based on their prior attainment, pupils make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are confident and polite. They present themselves smartly in school uniform. Attendance is similar to the national picture and has remained stable for some years. A small proportion of parents raised concerns about behaviour but, during the inspection, inspectors found behaviour to be good in lessons and around the school. Pupils have a good

understanding of how to lead a healthy life, they make good and sensible choices in what they eat at break and lunchtimes and packed lunches are well balanced. Pupils adopt safe practices in the way they move around in a considerate and orderly manner and in the way they handle equipment in practical lessons such as design and technology. As a result, pupils feel safe, comfortable and free from intimidation, and they confirm that Year 10 buddies and sixth form mentors contribute well to this feature of the school. Pupils are keen and willing to take on responsibility and they make sensible suggestions to improve the school, for example upgrading the toilets and providing support to quit smoking. Pupils make a good contribution to the local and wider community through a wide range of activities. Music is very prominent, with the Big Band playing at most city festivals. Charity extends to a home zone party for senior citizens. Economic well-being is satisfactory with good opportunities for older pupils to gain workplace skills. However, there is not enough careers guidance for younger pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has put in place a common format for lesson planning and this is providing a sound structure and focus on what pupils must learn. Teachers have good subject knowledge, start lessons briskly and clearly explain lesson objectives. The many examples of good practice include involving pupils in assessing their own and each other's work. However, lessons do not have different resources and planned activities that are matched to the full range of pupils' abilities. Questioning techniques are not always used effectively to support learning.

The majority of pupils have a positive attitude to their work. However, where lessons are too teacher-centred or where pupils are not sufficiently challenged or explicitly praised for their contributions, they become passive learners. Pupils generally know what level they are working at. Most teachers use appropriate feedback in their marking and lessons to inform pupils what they need to do to improve and move to a higher level, although this is not firmly established in all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a good curriculum with plans to develop it further by reorganising the school day and providing additional courses which meet the full range of pupils' abilities and aspirations. The school is working in collaboration with other institutions to offer the new engineering and business diplomas which will start in September 2009. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved.

The school works effectively with the local further education college to provide a good range of vocational courses in areas such as construction, engineering, hairdressing and business administration, although there are fewer opportunities for vocational courses in the sixth form. Enrichment activities for pupils are very good and all pupils benefit from out of school clubs during the week and during holidays. Although pupils do not receive two hours of timetabled physical education per week, a range of sports clubs and activities help to promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils are encouraged to develop their study skills through the 'Learn to Learn'

programme. Provision for ICT has been reorganised and is now more appropriate to the needs of the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Procedures for child protection are in place and risk assessments and checks for health and safety are followed carefully to help ensure pupils are safe. Pupils move around the school safely and are well supervised by staff. Suitable targets are set for progress and behaviour and these are carefully monitored. Personal, health, social and citizenship lessons help ensure pupils are aware of health and safety matters, drugs and sex education. The effective advice and support on careers for older pupils are being gradually extended for younger ones. Older pupils are aware of the options available to them and have a clear picture of what they want to do when they leave school. The school hosts joint meetings with external agencies and works effectively to ensure good links with them. A range of provision is in place to provide for pupils experiencing stress or other problems. The transition to the school from primary schools and the move from upper school to sixth form is managed well to help pupils settle in their new environment.

Progress is monitored effectively by the school to identify those pupils who are at risk of underachieving and a range of appropriate measures exists to support them, including study support sessions held after school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher provides very strong leadership to the staff. He is determined and has responded very effectively to the many challenges facing the school from securing continued improvement to the declining number of pupils entering Year 7. The headteacher and senior staff work together to provide a clear direction for the school. Middle managers particularly value the responsibility and authority they have been given for focusing on improvements, for example, in targeting underachieving pupils. Whole-school priorities are clear and planning to achieve them is systematic. They are based on a careful analysis of a range of information which reveals the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Where there has been pupil underachievement, such as the underachievement of older boys, action has been taken and its impact monitored. The school has taken satisfactory steps to ensure equal opportunities for all pupils. Behaviour, as well as academic achievement, is well monitored. The governors have a clear view of the school's progress and are supportive and challenging. The link of particular governors to aspects of school improvement planning, so the governor can work with the member of staff responsible, is helpful in this. The school is keen to work with the local authority in planning for its long-term future.

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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	3
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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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	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	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?	2	3
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?	2	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	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	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave to my colleagues and me when we visited your school recently. Thank you for talking with us and giving us your views. We were impressed by your good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.

Inspectors have judged the school to be satisfactory with many good features. It is an inclusive school where you feel safe. The school provides good care and support. You make a good contribution to the local and wider community through music bands and a range of charity work. The school council has made some useful improvements and suggestions. Sixth form students act as good role models to the rest of the school by being House Captains. The school offers a good range of opportunities for you through the curriculum, such as part-time courses at the local college. You make good progress during Key Stage 3 and results for the national tests at the end of Year 9 continue to improve and are now above the national average. Pass rates and high grades for A and AS levels showed good improvement in 2007. The school has given high priority to improving the quality of the lessons you receive and teaching is much more consistent across the school. The headteacher has worked very hard to ensure the school carries on its journey of improvement.

There are some things that the school can do to become better. We have asked the headteacher and senior managers to:

- improve how well you do in your GCSE examinations by making sure extra support works well and is appropriate to your needs
- share good practice to ensure that more teaching is good or outstanding and that a range of stimulating tasks and resources caters for the full range of your abilities.

Senior managers have a clear view of how the school is doing and where they can make improvements. The managers, teachers, governors and staff are very committed to their work. We encourage you to continue to support the school and play your part in making it even better. On behalf of the inspection team, may I wish you every success in the future.

1 February 2008



Dear Pupils

Inspection of Nether Stowe High School, Lichfield WS13 7NB

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Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh
Her Majesty's Inspector