

The Friary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124422
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314927
Inspection dates	17–18 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Mary Davis

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1099
6th form	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve James
Headteacher	John M Brough
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2004
School address	Eastern Avenue Lichfield WS13 7EW
Telephone number	01543 510631
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Friary is a large community school, serving a diverse socio-economic area. The proportion of students claiming free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average, due partly to this being a Pathway school catering for students with physical disabilities. A small proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups and the percentage of students with English as an additional language is very low. The school has dual specialist college status in the visual and performing arts and sport, first awarded in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Friary is an improving community school that provides a good standard of education. Overall, students make good progress and achieve standards above the average achieved nationally. Their personal development and well-being are good, particularly in their social skills and the contribution they make to the school and wider community.

The impact of specialist college status is evident throughout the school. Its theme of 'The Power of the Dream' can be seen in the high standard of art displays, the wide opportunities offered in sport and the performing arts, and the focus on celebration of success. This, together with the improvements in the school's accommodation and resources, results in a positive learning environment and a buzzing atmosphere. The high level of participation in the activities offered and outstanding attendance levels demonstrate students' good levels of enjoyment and enthusiasm for school life. Students are able to achieve the highest standards in art and design, sport and the performing arts, as can be seen by the numbers who have represented the school at a national and professional level.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Some teachers, however, still fail to plan sufficiently for the different abilities within each class. Teachers know their students well, and relationships and attitudes to learning are good. In some good lessons seen, students enjoyed a variety of activities and had frequent opportunities to show their understanding and take responsibility for their own learning. However, they say that they wish all assessment and marking of their work was as good as the best practice, as they do not always know how to improve. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well in the classroom, and their parents value this.

The curriculum provision is good, reflecting the school's specialisms well. Drama is offered in Key Stage 3 and a variety of pathways in Key Stage 4, with links to local colleges, enable students to follow their individual interests and talents. The provision for modern foreign languages is also a strength of the curriculum, resulting in a high take-up at GCSE.

Care, support and guidance are good. The school's strong pastoral care is reflected in students' care for younger and vulnerable students and the outstanding provision for those with physical disabilities. Students know their targets, and underachieving students are quickly identified and supported. Transitions between each key stage are managed well, enabling students to follow courses that best suit their needs.

The previous inspection galvanised the school's leaders into action and heightened awareness of the need to ensure that all students achieve as well as possible. Consequently, a significant number of initiatives have been introduced to raise attainment. Leadership and management is now good. The outstanding leadership of the specialist college has had an enormous impact, influencing practice in other parts of the school. The leadership team, strongly supported by the governing body, recognises where the school needs to improve and shares a common vision for the future.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory, with good curriculum provision. Students say they enjoy school, as can be seen by the large numbers from Year 11 and other schools who embark on sixth form studies. Progress is satisfactory in relation to students' standards

on entry. They achieve above the national average in AS level, particularly in mathematics. At A level, achievement is very similar to the national average. The small number of students opting for vocational courses achieve above the national average, particularly in the performing arts.

Students take an active role in the school providing good role models for younger students. They contribute well to the school and wider community, developing good personal skills, for example in the sports leadership programme. They are confident, articulate, and anxious to do well, and are therefore rightly concerned about the variable quality of marking and the impact of staff absence on their learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In many lessons seen, varied learning activities challenged all students, with clear advice on how to make good progress. However, in a few lessons, the learning tasks are not sufficiently challenging and there are few opportunities and guidance to develop independent learning.

Care, guidance and support for students are good, though the daily tutorial time is not used constructively, and the monitoring of attendance, punctuality and progress is not sufficiently rigorous. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. In recent years, some procedures have become lax, but the school has already taken steps to improve them by delegating oversight of the sixth form to an assistant headteacher.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve assessment to ensure that students know how to develop their work by building on the examples of good practice seen in some subjects such as design and technology, sport and the performing arts.
- Build on current good practice in teaching by ensuring that all teachers plan lessons with activities that match precisely the different abilities of students within each class.
- Ensure that sixth form teachers always provide students with challenging tasks and opportunities to develop independent learning, to improve standards and achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students join the school having reached above average standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science in their previous schools. In Year 9, standards are also above average, with an improving number of students reaching higher levels. By the end of Year 11, they have exceeded the challenging targets they have been set. Key Stage 4 data over the last three years indicates improving performance.

Standards in English, which in the past have been below average, have improved, and targets in Key Stage 3 for students gaining Level 5 and above have now been met. The proportion of students gaining five or more higher GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, continues to improve, being now above the national average. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment in Key Stage 3 remains similar to that on entry to the school, but by the end of Key Stage 4, boys and girls make similar progress. Improvements in the quality of teaching ensure that pupils achieve well in most lessons and the school's data shows that students are now making good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Good provision for students with disabilities ensures that they make equally good progress compared with other students. The school recognises that the alternative course provided for a group of Year 11 students last year did not always provide adequately for their needs and led to some underachievement. New work-based learning opportunities and support for learners who are unable to follow the full range of subjects are now in place, although it is too early to judge their impact.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good, although their awareness of living in today's multi-cultural society is less well developed.

Effective procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance have led to improvements and attendance is now well above average.

Students generally behave well and the school deals effectively with the minority who do not. They are polite, helpful and friendly and demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning and each other. Students contribute well to the school and wider community and are keen to take on responsibilities; for example, many train as mentors so they can support young or vulnerable students. School Council members take their responsibilities very seriously and the school listens to and acts on their views. The School Council has taken effective steps to improve the school meals and to prevent bullying and racism, incidents of which are rare and swiftly dealt with. As a result of a high level of participation in an extensive range of extra-curricular sports, students have an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lives and choose to eat and drink healthily. They feel safe and well cared for. Global awareness is well developed through visits to France, Germany and Spain and through Fair Trade activities. Students take their citizenship responsibilities seriously, organising fund-raising activities to support a range of charities, and all tutor groups take responsibility for organising events on a weekly basis. Students represent the school at the Youth Parliament at local and national level and the activities of the environmental group have resulted in the school's Eco School status.

The good opportunities to undertake work experience, vocational courses and Young Enterprise Activities ensure that students are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students say that lessons are more interesting since the school gained specialist college status. Some teachers are outstanding role models, inspiring students to aim higher. Students are keen to learn and, where teaching is good, they are excited by the active tasks they are set. In these lessons, learning objectives are shared with students and, at the end of the lesson, are reviewed so that students understand and can demonstrate what they have learned. This is not apparent in all lessons seen and the quality of planning is variable. Some tasks lack sufficient challenge

to enable students to make good progress. Teachers deal sensitively and quickly with any unacceptable behaviour and there is a strong ethos of mutual respect.

Assessment is satisfactory. The best practice offers opportunities throughout the lesson for students to evaluate their own and each other's work with clear targets for improvement. However, this is not evident in all subjects. Marking of work at its best is regular and informative; however, this approach is not uniform and students rightly comment that they want clearer marking of their work. Homework is not always used effectively to develop independent learning skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's curriculum overall is very broad and is designed to provide all students with increasingly flexible choices as they get older. There is a wide range of enrichment activities on offer, including visits, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and booster sessions to improve students' achievement. Students and their parents value these extra-curricular activities and they are well supported. Work experience is an integral part of the curriculum and some sixth form students undertake to do this abroad, thus enhancing their personal development. The revised citizenship curriculum is having a positive impact on students' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are good overall. Very effective procedures ensure Year 7 students settle quickly into the school. Arrangements for safeguarding students are secure. Students say they feel safe and there is always someone to turn to if they need help. They appreciate having access to phone numbers and e-mail addresses so they can get advice confidentially and quickly. The school's inclusion unit and learning support area provide a calm and supportive atmosphere, valued by students and parents. Careers advice is good and students are well prepared to move between key stages. Vastly improved procedures to track students' progress enables underachievement to be identified early and support put in place. The school works hard to raise students' aspirations, for example taking them to see a range of universities. The school has excellent links with external support agencies, such as 'Relate' and bereavement counsellors. Combined with the 'drop in' sessions provided by the school nurse, this means vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties have access to good quality advice and support. As a result, they achieve well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's leadership team has worked hard since the last inspection to reverse the pattern of under-achievement that had been developing, particularly in English. New appointments to the senior leadership and middle management teams have already had a positive impact, particularly in English, specialist status and data tracking.

A significant amount of professional development has enabled teachers to improve the quality of their lessons, and the appointment of new teachers has strengthened the teaching team. The school's leaders are working to ensure that all teaching and assessment are up to the standards of best practice, so that students can make good progress throughout the school. Some of the setting arrangements do not provide enough stimulation through the provision of good role models for the school's least able students.

The school has developed a very good data system which is being used effectively to set challenging targets and identify students who need extra help in order to achieve their potential.

The leadership team has a good understanding of its own strengths and areas for development, evident from the school's accurate self-evaluation and focused development plan. The governors are good 'critical friends' of the school and contribute to the direction and effectiveness of leadership and management. The school runs efficiently and the budget is managed well. The leadership team is strong and clearly focused on raising standards and achievement, indicating a good capacity to improve.

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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?	2	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?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	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	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	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?	2	3
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	3
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	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

19 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Friary School, Lichfield WS13 7EW

On behalf of the inspectors who visited the Friary School, I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave us. We enjoyed the opportunity to share your achievements and talk to you in lessons and in meetings, and were particularly impressed with the friendly and mature way in which you answered our questions.

The inspection team found that yours is a good school. The school buildings, equipment and art displays provide a good environment in which to learn. You are set challenging targets, and examination results are improving. You make good progress because you have positive attitudes to learning and, in most subjects, your teachers set you work which matches your ability. In our discussions with you, it was clear that you are proud of your school and enjoy the wide range of opportunities you are offered. The school's specialist status in arts and sport makes lessons more interesting and enables many of you to achieve at the very highest level. We were also impressed by the level of care you show towards one another and the pride you take in representing your school. You feel safe and that your views are listened to and acted upon.

There are some areas where the school recognises it needs to continue to develop. You told us of your concerns that teachers' marking does not always help you to develop your work and we agree with you. We have also asked teachers to make sure that they all provide suitable work to challenge all abilities within a class. We know that some sixth form students have been concerned about their ability to make good progress and so we have asked the school to ensure sixth form teachers always provide you with challenging tasks and opportunities to develop independent learning.

We left the school confident that it will continue to improve in these areas to promote good achievement for all students. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mary Davis Lead inspector

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