

Stafford Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124467
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314940
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2007
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	487
6th form	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patricia Rowlands
Headteacher	Rowena Blencowe
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Wolverhampton Road Stafford ST17 9DJ
Telephone number	01785 258383
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Stafford Sports College is smaller than most secondary schools. It became a specialist sports college in September 2005. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above the national average. The sixth form is relatively small and is part of a consortium made up of local schools and a local college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to standards and achievement at Key Stage 4 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

At the time of the last inspection, the school was asked to improve standards in the core subjects, but this has not happened. Although achievement is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, achievement and standards at Key Stage 4 have been declining and have been inadequate for the last few years, especially in the core subjects. The new headteacher arrived in January 2007 and has made a significant impact in a short space of time. Under her strong leadership, standards have improved in 2007; however, they still remain inadequate. Tracking of current Year 11 students and modular exam results indicate that standards will continue to improve. The headteacher has implemented a number of strategies to raise achievement, but some are still new and do not yet show enough impact. The school has experienced some staffing difficulties in mathematics and science but has worked hard to resolve the issues. The headteacher has the support of staff to help her bring about further improvement. Attendance has improved and is now at the national average as a result of a number of effective strategies such as truancy call. The behaviour of students is broadly satisfactory because it is now better managed. The success of the school's recent actions confirms that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

The school has used its status as a specialist sports college to widen the curriculum and cultivate links with the community, other schools and businesses. Sports status is bringing benefits to the students and school. Alongside improved facilities, there are more opportunities for sport within the curriculum. For example, a BTEC sports qualification has been introduced for Year 9 students. The range of extra-curricular activities is good, with high rates of participation. This supports the good development of students' health and fitness. Just under a third of Year 11 students completed the junior sports leadership award. Students lead sporting activities in local primary schools, who value their work. Students make a good contribution to the community. The school is the hub for the Stafford and Stone Sports Partnership. The satisfactory curriculum is broad and increasingly meets the needs of the students. The care, guidance and support for students is satisfactory. Students feel safe. They are well looked after, and are nurtured in small tutor groups.

While standards in teaching are steadily improving, teaching is satisfactory overall. There are mostly good relationships with students. In good lessons, there is very effective use of questioning techniques and a stimulating range of activities. However, teaching is often uninspiring and lacks enough pace to challenge students to learn more quickly. Marking is inconsistent and too much does not provide guidance on what students could do to improve further.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior managers know the school well and have a clear overview of what needs to be done to improve the school further. However, middle managers do not have a consistent and rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating

performance. This is evident in subject self-evaluations where there is not enough emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and learning to raise standards.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards in the sixth form are below average. However, achievement is satisfactory, given the students' below-average starting points on joining the sixth form. The school has recognised that there were areas of underachievement in 2007, which have now been addressed. Academic guidance has improved with more effective use of target setting. The curriculum is jointly provided with local schools and a local college. This enables a breadth of courses to be offered, including both vocational and academic options. Teaching is satisfactory overall. The students enjoy their time in the sixth form and the individual support they get from their teachers. Students' personal development and well-being is good. They take an active part in many school events, such as the transition day for Year 6 students and enterprise activities within the local community. The role of sixth form students in the school has been enhanced, with some of them taking on the new role of ambassadors. The three-day residential provides a good introduction for students new into the sixth form and is a focus for the development of social skills. The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. However, there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of sixth form provision, including checks on teaching and learning and analysis of performance data.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement in the core subjects at Key Stage 4 by setting students targets that are more ambitious.
- Ensure there is more teaching which is good or better, by making sure all lessons have sufficient challenge and interest and that students understand what they need to do to improve their work.
- Develop the role of middle managers so they are more effective in raising standards and rigorous in their monitoring and evaluation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with below-average standards. They make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 and results in the national results showed an improving trend until 2007, when there was a dip in results in all core subjects.

The school recognises that there is underachievement in many subjects at Key Stage 4 and especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The progress students make is inadequate and has been for some years. Boys and a small number of students with statements of special educational need underachieve. In 2006, the progress made by students at Key Stage 4, based on their starting points, was inadequate. Some improvements were made in 2007 as a result of intervention strategies such as mentoring and extra revision lessons. The impact of the literacy work is evident in the increasing number of students obtaining an A* to C grade in GCSE English. At GCSE, some subjects are considerably more successful, such as sports studies, expressive arts, design and technology and geography. Modular results for Year 11 students in 2007 show that standards will continue to improve.

Standards on entry to the sixth form are below average. Pass rates on the small number of A and AS level and vocational courses are below average and vary from year to year. Students' progress in the sixth form is satisfactory overall.

The statutory targets set by the school at Key Stage 3 and 4 have not been met. The GCSE results for 2007 were well below target. However, many of the specialist school targets have been achieved for sports.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. In assemblies, a wider respect and knowledge of different cultures is promoted, which encourages most students to appreciate the needs of others. Around school, relationships are good; students are generally supportive of one another and feel safe. Students know who to turn to for support. Students' behaviour is satisfactory overall. The school, parents and students acknowledge that, in a minority of lessons, the behaviour of a few affects progress. Good strategies to improve the attitudes and behaviour of these students have been introduced and, where there is consistency in lessons, this is effective. A large number of students were temporarily excluded in 2006 to combat unacceptable behaviour. Numbers are still high in 2007 following efforts to address bullying and verbal abuse. However, appropriate action to retain disaffected students in full-time education has been employed. Attendance is now at the national average and is satisfactory. The school strives to persuade some parents to appreciate that students' achievement is affected by absence.

The elected school council ensures students are listened to and there have been improvements to the school environment as a result. The variety and balance of food offered at lunchtime have improved. There are very good sporting opportunities to promote health and fitness so students have a good awareness of healthy living. A good range of other clubs extends learning, including a revision programme; students are given incentives to attend this. Extensive charity work makes a good contribution to the wider community. Most students enjoy school activities. Students acknowledge the wide variety of clubs and activities, especially in sports. As one Year 9 pupil said, 'There's a lot going on.'

Students are adequately informed about future careers through specially focused sessions; however, the low standards in information and communication technology, English and mathematics impinge on their economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

While teaching is now satisfactory overall, there is not enough good teaching to overcome students' past underachievement. There are signs that teaching and learning are improving. Teachers show good subject knowledge. They mostly establish good relationships within lessons and largely manage behaviour well. As a result, students are generally keen to learn and are now mostly making satisfactory progress in lessons. Students gain the most from lessons where

the activities and questioning encourage them to discuss, explain and think about what they are doing. There are still too many with inconsistencies in practice. For example, teachers do not always plan activities with sufficient challenge. The pace of some lessons is too slow to accelerate learning and the rate of progress that students are making. The quality of marking varies and students do not receive enough specific guidance on how well they are doing and what they should do in order to improve. The school recognises the need to ensure more consistency and rigour in its approach to assessment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is broad and meets the needs of students. Assessment and reporting of citizenship education comes into effect later this year and the school will then meet statutory requirements. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 offers a wide range of opportunities, including vocational pathways, but the provision of enterprise opportunities to develop economic well-being is underdeveloped. The specialist college status is reflected in the inclusion of several well-linked courses in sports and physical education. In addition, sports leadership courses are building the confidence of students and enhancing work-related opportunities as well as encouraging independent learning. A good, extensive range of extra-curricular provision is valued by students and contributes to their enjoyment of school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Overall, the quality of care, guidance and support for students is satisfactory. The pastoral system effectively identifies individual needs and there is appropriate and well-coordinated support for students involving external agencies. This includes support for the behavioural management of students. The emotional health project provides swift access to mental health advice. The mentoring system is open to all Year 11 students and provides effective advice in the run-up to GCSEs. Tracking and monitoring systems to identify potential underachievement have improved but are not used to consistent effect by tutors, subject teachers and heads of house. The responsibility for monitoring overall achievement is not well defined in the new house structure. The newly formed heads of house have helped to improve students' attendance. Arrangements for careers guidance are satisfactory. Statutory requirements for health, safety, risk assessment and child protection are fully met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

In a short period, the headteacher has successfully engendered a strong sense of common purpose amongst staff, with a clear focus on raising standards. The systematic checking by senior leaders of the quality of education provided by the school is leading to plans that are tackling underachievement and raising standards. For example, they have worked closely with staff on improving behaviour management so that lessons can be well managed. The senior

leaders have introduced effective extra support, such as booster classes, for students who have slipped behind with their work. This is beginning to raise standards at Key Stage 4. The senior leaders recognised that attendance was inadequate and have taken successful measures to improve it. As a result, attendance is now average.

The headteacher recognises that while achievement is improving, it remains inadequate overall and that not all students are making the progress that they should. The effectiveness of subject leaders in bringing about improvements in their areas is variable. For example, the checking of teachers' work and plans to raise the standards of teaching and learning are not well developed in all subjects. This means that the quality of teaching and the rate of students' progress vary too much from subject to subject. The development of middle leaders is an area identified by the school for further development.

Governors provide conscientious support for the school. They monitor the work of the school carefully and through their developing understanding of data are beginning to challenge its performance.

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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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	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	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
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?	3	3

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	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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
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?	Yes	

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 me and my colleagues when we visited your school recently. We very much appreciated you taking the time to speak with us about your work. There have been many positive changes in the school since the new headteacher arrived.

Some of you told us that behaviour has improved. You feel safe and well looked after. Attendance has also improved. Teaching is satisfactory and getting better. You enjoy lessons when you are asked lots of challenging questions and there is a range of interesting activities. The school's specialist status in sports is bringing benefits to you and the school. There are more opportunities for sports in the curriculum. Many of you take part in a range of sporting activities. This supports the development of your health and fitness. Some of you have completed the junior sports leadership award and local primary schools are very positive about the sports activities you undertake with them. You make a good contribution to the community, participating in an extensive range of charity work. In the sixth form, you have a good choice of courses which are jointly provided with local schools and a local college. The three-day residential is a good introduction to sixth form life.

While the sixth form is satisfactory, the main school is not providing you with an adequate education. We have agreed with the headteacher, senior managers and governors that there are a number of important things to concentrate on, to improve your experience at school and help you to do well. These are:

- Improve your performance in English, mathematics and science by setting you harder targets.
- Ensure there is more teaching which is good or better, by making sure all lessons are interesting and set you challenging work. You also need to understand how you can improve your work.
- Managers of subjects need to take a bigger role in helping you do better.

Inspectors will visit again during the next year to see how the school is getting on with its work. We encourage you to continue to support the school by continuing to improve attendance and behaviour. Best wishes for your future success.

5 October 2007

Dear Students



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Her Majesty's Inspector