

The Bewdley School & Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135035
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	319596
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Gwendoline Coates 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 (total)	939
Sixth form	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	W Talbot
Headteacher	Julie Reilly
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Stourport Road Bewdley DY12 1BL
Telephone number	01299 403277
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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 three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Bewdley School and Sixth Form Centre opened in September 2007 as a new school. It was formed from the amalgamation of two middle schools and a high school. It is an average-sized school. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is below the national average as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national average but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The majority of staff are new to the school site, including the headteacher and most of the senior leadership.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Bewdley School and Sixth Form Centre is a satisfactory school with many good features. The headteacher has set very high expectations and a very strong focus on raising achievement and improving the quality of educational provision. Together with her senior leadership team, she has undertaken a clear and incisive evaluation of provision, which matches exactly those made by the inspection team.

The school's analysis of its strengths and weaknesses is leading to very well targeted strategies for improvement. However, because of the newness of the school, it is too early for the impact of many of these strategies to have had a significant effect. Thus, although improvements are evident in achievement and standards, in teaching and learning and in the curriculum, they have not yet been significant enough to raise the overall judgements in these areas above satisfactory. However, excellent direction given by the leadership team and the good capacity to improve suggest that the pace of improvement is quickening. What the school already does well is in the area of care, guidance and support for its students and the impact of this is already evident in their good personal development and well-being.

Students' attainment is broadly in line with the national average and their progress overall is satisfactory. In many lessons, students make good progress because of good teaching and effective assessment. Almost all the teaching is satisfactory or better and it is good in the majority of lessons. However, marking is not yet of a quality that enables students to know how well they are doing and how they can improve further. The curriculum, and the extent to which it matches students' needs, is good at Key Stage 4 and is improving at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. There are many opportunities for sporting and other extra-curricular activities. The tracking of students' progress is good in the sixth form and at Key Stage 4, but as yet, is not sufficiently developed at Key Stage 3 to ensure that underachievement is promptly identified and students are fully supported. Middle leaders are now fully accountable for their areas of responsibility. Although self-evaluation at whole-school level is incisive, accurate and thorough, this is not yet consistently the case at subject level.

Despite this period of significant reorganisation and change, parental support for the school is positive. There are good links with a range of external agencies, organisations, and partner schools and colleges to support students and enhance the provision for them. A lot has been achieved in the short time since the school opened and, importantly, the school has focused on, and addressed as a priority, those issues that create a firm foundation for further improvement. As a result, students' behaviour and attendance are good. The impact of good leadership and management can be seen in the improving progress seen in lessons, in the improvements to the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the clear lines of accountability of managers at all levels.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides students with a satisfactory and improving quality of education. Recent improvements have been made to the curriculum so that it now matches more closely the needs of the wide range of students that enter the sixth form. The new AS and A-level courses in applied science, applied information and communication technology (ICT) and critical thinking attract good numbers and the new Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) course

in public services provides a more work-related option. More vocational courses are planned for next year, including photography and fine-art textiles.

Achievement is satisfactory overall and standards are broadly average. However, the progress of students by the end of Year 12 was lower than expected. As a result, a new system for monitoring the progress of students has been put in place and this is already beginning to have an impact on raising achievement. Students are aware of their targets and those who are underachieving are identified at an early stage so that appropriate support and guidance can be offered. Students are appreciative of this support and are developing positive attitudes to study.

Students' personal development is good and they become mature and responsible young adults. An active sixth form committee has its own budget. Good opportunities are provided for sixth formers to enhance the running of the school, such as their mentoring of students in Key Stage 3. Students receive good careers and education advice. This ensures that they select subjects that prepare them well to go on to higher education or to enter the world of work.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The team of tutors is ably led by the director of learning who is much liked and respected by students. The improvements made to the curriculum and the assessment tracking system indicate a strong capacity for the sixth form provision to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement by disseminating the best practice in teaching across all subjects and all key stages.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking so that all learners know where they are in their learning and how to improve.
- Embed systematic and effective learner tracking across Key Stages 3 and 4 so that all students are fully supported and able to make good progress.
- Improve the consistency of self-evaluation at subject level so that all are as good as the best.

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

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. The school's data suggest that the results at Key Stage 3 are below target, possibly because of the significant changes to learning resulting from the reorganisation of education in the local area. However, students' attainment is broadly average. In 2008, standards at Key Stage 4 were above the national average, with 70% of students attaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C and 55% attaining this level including English and mathematics. The proportion of students attaining grades A* to C in a modern foreign language and those gaining two or more grades A* to C in science were significantly above the national average. All students achieved at least one pass grade. Overall, the progress of students is satisfactory and their achievement is as expected. However, the school recognises that there is underachievement among boys. Evidence from lesson observations suggests that students' progress is improving, with good progress occurring in the majority of lessons. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve broadly in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are proud of their school and enjoy learning. This is reflected in their above average attendance rates. The school has a calm and friendly atmosphere. Behaviour is good and inspectors observed sensible behaviour around the school at break times and lunch times. Students have positive relationships with each other, their teachers and other adults in the school. They have a strong sense of what is right and wrong and report that bullying is minimal. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported, enjoy school, feel safe and are very much a part of the school community.

Students make good contributions to the school community through the effective and active year councils and school council. There are also developing links with the local community, which, alongside the range of opportunities to be involved in vocational courses, is contributing effectively to students' understanding of the world of work and to their acquisition of work-based skills. Cultural and spiritual awareness, especially multicultural diversity, are less well developed but there is good practice in the arts and music. Overall, students adopt healthy lifestyles. The school offers a broad range of additional opportunities to promote their awareness of health matters. Students are increasingly taking advantage of these opportunities, for example through the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The nurse drop-in centre is a facility that is valued by students and its use is carefully monitored.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Students are keen to learn and their attitudes towards learning are good. They work well on the tasks they are set and their progress in lessons is satisfactory, and often better than this, as a result. There are good relationships between students and teachers and behaviour in lessons is good. Many of the strategies used to improve the quality of teaching are having a positive impact on students' progress. However, these are not yet fully embedded in everyday practice across the school. In many lessons, teachers share objectives and learning outcomes with students but they are not consistently used during lessons to aid students' progress. Most students are aware of their targets but inconsistencies in the quality of marking mean they are less sure of how to improve.

Students make faster progress in those lessons where teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan a range of learning activities that engage, motivate and stimulate students to make good or outstanding progress. In such lessons, independent learning is encouraged, questioning techniques involve all students and students are given opportunities to reflect on their learning. As a result, students give perceptive insights using appropriate vocabulary and work independently to determine solutions rather than being given answers by the teacher. In lessons that are merely satisfactory, teachers do not check students' understanding of learning outcomes and the range of learning activities is limited, with too much teacher direction and too few opportunities for independent learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum provision at Key Stage 3 and 4 is broadly balanced and ensures that statutory requirements are met in full. At Key Stage 3, an increasing range of courses are linked to the new National Curriculum initiatives. For example, the introduction of discrete 'learning to learn' lessons is having a positive impact on learning. However, there has been insufficient time for these developments to have their full impact on students' progress. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum matches the needs of students well, including vocational courses, and courses for lower ability students and for higher attaining students. The school has developed effective partnerships with the local college and other local schools to enhance what it offers to students and is fully involved in the development of 14 to 19 Diploma courses. The provision for extra-curricular and enrichment activities is good. Students in Key Stage 3 particularly appreciate the opportunities for using the much-improved ICT facilities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

In this inclusive school, every child really does matter. This is evident in the vision, preparation and development planning for this new school. There is a strong commitment to equality and opportunity for all. Health and safety, including risk assessment, is managed effectively and the school has a range of policies in place to promote student safety. Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and students confirm that they feel safe and secure. The inclusion suite provides support for any student who finds mainstream school difficult and allows for integration at the student's own pace. There are close and effective links with a variety of outside agencies to support students' individual needs. The school makes good use of all support agencies, as well as its own resources, to make sure that its most vulnerable students have the best care and support in lessons.

Systems for tracking students' academic progress are developing but have yet to be fully embedded across all key stages and across the academic and pastoral divide. Many students know their target levels or grades but they are less confident about how to improve their work and take ownership of their learning. There are inconsistencies in the quality of marking to inform learning both across and within subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Inspirational but very practical leadership has been the defining characteristic of the new headteacher, who has, in a very short space of time, managed to promote a clear sense of vision and shared values for this new school. Aply supported by a strong leadership team, she has set clear direction with a strong focus on raising achievement and standards. Challenging but realistic targets have been set in order to raise expectations among teachers and students. Middle leaders are supported well as they become increasingly accountable for the achievement of students and the performance of teachers in their subject areas. School self-evaluation is developing well. It is very strong at whole-school level, where an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for development are identified. Good practice in relation to self-evaluation is evident at subject level, but this is not yet consistent across all subjects.

Inclusion is a real strength of the school and equality of opportunity is promoted very well. The location of the inclusion suite in the heart of the school exemplifies this. Community cohesion is developing well and the school recognises the need to extend its community beyond the school and the local area. Resources have been deployed effectively, for example in the improvements to ICT resources and the physical environment for learning. Value for money is evident in the improving achievement of students, the introduction and accommodation of three separate year groups into the school at reorganisation in September 2007 and the school's good capacity to improve. Governors are committed to the school and ensure that the school meets current statutory requirements for safeguarding.

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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	NA	NA
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	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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 learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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	

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

28 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Bewdley School and Sixth Form Centre, Bewdley, DY12 1BL

On behalf of my team of inspectors, I should like to thank you for the very pleasant and mature welcome you gave to us when we visited your school recently.

We judged your school to be satisfactory with many good features. In a very short space of time, your headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team, has introduced very well targeted strategies to bring about improvement. These strategies are already beginning to have an impact. For example, after the first year of the school's existence, students at Key Stage 4 attained good results in their GCSE examinations, with 70% gaining 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C and 55% attaining this level including English and mathematics. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 now provides appropriate opportunities for all of you. What the school does particularly well is to care, guide and support you. The impact of this is evident in your good personal development, including your good behaviour and attendance. It is also evident in how equality of opportunity for all is promoted so that, without exception, you all feel safe, enjoy and feel part of the school.

Many actions have already been taken to bring about improvement and these are beginning to have an impact on improving the education you receive. We have asked the school to focus on the following areas to bring about further improvement.

- Raise achievement by ensuring that all lessons are as good as the best lessons.
- Improve the quality and consistency of marking so that you know where you are in your learning and how to improve.
- Systematically monitor how well you are doing in Key Stages 3 and 4 so that you are all fully supported and able to make good progress.
- Improve the consistency of self-evaluation by subject departments so that all subject departments are as good as the best.

You can help your new school to develop further by continuing to behave well, attend well and work as hard as possible.

Best wishes for your futures,

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates

Her Majesty's Inspector