

Stretford Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106368
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	324383
Inspection dates	9–10 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Vincent Ashworth HMI

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 (total)	755
Sixth form	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T McManus
Headteacher	Mr Peter Cookson
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Granby Road Stretford Manchester Greater Manchester M32 8JB
Telephone number	0161 865 2293
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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

Stretford Grammar School is a selective school which is smaller than average; it became a Foundation School in 2008. The school serves a community that includes some areas with high levels of social and economic disadvantage, although the proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is slightly lower than average. A high number of students join the school at times other than the start of Year 7. Almost two thirds of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds; around one quarter is of Pakistani heritage. Around 30% of students speak a first language other than English. There are significantly more boys than girls in the main school. There are very few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Around one third of students who enter the sixth form come from other schools in the area. The school has been a specialist science college since 2005. At the time of inspection, both the headteacher and one of the assistant headteachers were on extended sick leave.

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 special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The overall effectiveness of the school has declined since the last inspection and is now inadequate. A decline in student numbers has impacted adversely on the school's budget, although the number of students currently in Year 7 is back on target. The school has found it difficult to replace the skills lost through staff redundancies. This is compounded by difficulties in recruiting staff to teach in specific subject specialisms such as information and communication technology (ICT). Provision in ICT at Key Stage 3 remains a weak aspect of the school. These issues have diverted leaders and managers away from making improvements to the school and ensuring that all students achieve their full potential.

Girls and higher ability students make insufficient progress. Mathematics and science subjects are weak in Key Stage 4. Too many students fail to attain the very highest grades they are capable of in their GCSE examinations. Teachers and managers have not had an accurate picture of the progress made by students; they have not always made correct assumptions about how well students are progressing. Systems and procedures for monitoring students' individual progress are still at an early stage of development and have not previously been sufficiently robust or accurate.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There are pockets of good practice and the excellent results in English, drama and music show what sparkling teaching and excellent classroom management can achieve. However, too much teaching remains lacklustre and is not good enough to ensure that all students achieve as well as they should. A decline in the standard of students' behaviour in lessons is a consequence of teaching that fails to challenge, extend and inspire. A review of the curriculum in 2008 failed to draw on staff opinion and students' views. Consequently, the curriculum is now inadequate in the main school and fails to provide students with all their statutory entitlements.

The fact that students develop well personally is testimony to the commitment and dedication of the staff. The atmosphere around the school is warm and friendly. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and built upon mutual respect. Attendance figures show that students enjoy coming to school. Parents are generally highly supportive of the school; however, a small proportion did express their concerns about the way the school has been managed.

Leadership and management are inadequate. Governance is inadequate and the school is not compliant with statutory requirements in relation to race equality and community cohesion. Very recently, policies have been put in place to improve teaching and learning and students' achievement. However, it is too early to see the impact of action taken on improved outcomes for students. The potential for subject leaders to develop as confident and competent managers has been significantly impaired by a lack of clear direction and steadfast leadership. The appointment of a new deputy headteacher has gone some way to alleviate this situation. However, the capacity of senior managers is currently undermined by the distractions of day-to-day operational issues. Middle managers have renewed confidence in the steer they

are being given by the deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher. There is a new determination amongst staff to face up to key weaknesses and tackle them head on.

The school's specialist science status has not had sufficient impact on raising students' achievement, improving the quality of teaching and learning or enhancing the curriculum. Collaborative working is underdeveloped. Developments in the school's specialism are compromised by weak planning, monitoring and evaluation. The school failed to meet its specialist school targets in 2008.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The quality of sixth form provision is satisfactory. Overall standards at advanced level are above average, though there are significant variations in performance between subjects. Students make satisfactory progress overall. The school successfully accommodates a high number of students from other schools. This reflects the school's commitment to inclusion; one sixth former described being a member of the sixth form as, 'feeling at home'. There is mutual respect between teachers and sixth-formers and this is a feature of the harmonious atmosphere in lessons. Students' personal development is good and the leadership of the sixth form plays an active and effective role in nurturing their well-being and progress. Teachers have very good subject expertise and apply this to providing good quality lessons. The academic curriculum is appropriate for students' needs; the school is looking at ways of enhancing it further by incorporating national developments in the 14-19 curriculum. Progression rates to university are high.

What the school should do to improve further

In order to raise achievement, particularly that of girls and higher ability students, the school should:

- Improve the effectiveness and consistency of governance and leadership and management at all levels.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so more of it is good or better.
- Provide a curriculum that meets statutory requirements and is better suited to students' needs and interests, especially in Key Stage 4.
- Ensure that information on students' performance is used consistently and effectively to meet challenging targets.
- Systematically monitor and evaluate the impact of both the school's equality policies and action taken to promote community cohesion.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students enter Year 7 with standards that are significantly above average. Standards attained in national tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 are exceptionally and consistently high. However, this masks some significant underachievement that has persisted over time. Even taking into account their high starting point, many students are capable of achieving considerably more than they do in Key Stage 4. Girls and higher ability students make very slow progress. Students' progress in mathematics and science subjects is unsatisfactory. Students' achievement overall is inadequate. The few students with learning

difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from good specialist support, consequently they make good progress.

Provisional results for national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2008 provide a glimmer of hope. Standards in English at Key Stage 3 have improved considerably and more students are attaining the very highest levels of which they are capable. Similarly, the rate of progress made by students during Key Stage 3 has increased.

Standards in the sixth form are above average. Students' progress varies from year- to-year, but in 2008 was satisfactory overall. Students' achievements in A level mathematics and biology are outstanding.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students say very clearly that they like their school, make good friends and enjoy lessons. They have positive attitudes to learning, particularly in the sixth form and their attendance is good. Students feel safe, secure and respected. They are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle, but insufficient time is allocated to physical education to support this goal. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are considerate and polite to one another and they generally work well together. They have positive relationships with staff and all feel included. Students develop social understanding and initiative by taking an active part in school life as council members, prefects and in the sixth form, as mentors. Behaviour is generally good around school, but persistent low-level disruption in too many lessons impedes progress. Students bring rich and vibrant multicultural experiences to the school, which are embraced in themed lessons and festival celebrations. Students make good progress in developing their personal qualities and work hard to gain merits and awards. They achieve good levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. As yet, students do not have enough opportunities to develop work-related and enterprise skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is very variable across the school. Teaching is strongest in the sixth form where teachers' subject expertise is used effectively to formulate questions that stimulate enquiry and test students' ability to think for themselves. The weakest teaching is in Key Stage 4. Although much teaching is satisfactory and some is better, there is insufficient good or better teaching to accelerate the pace of student's progress. Generally, in good and better lessons students are involved in the development of ideas. Work is challenging and the teacher deploys a variety of strategies that secure engagement, interest and enjoyment. Consequently, progress is brisk and learning is with understanding. Teaching in drama, music, history, English and modern foreign languages exemplifies these strong features. In less effective and lack-lustre lessons, the teachers dominate, answer their own questions and provide few opportunities for students to explain or reflect on their learning. As a result learning, particularly that of girls, becomes passive and the rate of progress slows. In many of these less effective lessons students are distracted by a low level of chatter that is not addressed by the teacher. The use of assessment as a tool for enhancing learning varies. There are some examples of effective practice but its use is not consistently applied within and across subjects. Consequently, students do not make the progress that they should over time to achieve as well as they should.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum in the main school is inadequate because statutory requirements are not being met and the range of options at Key Stage 4 does not meet the needs and interests of all students. The school does not meet statutory requirements for information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 7 to 9 nor for physical education, personal, social and health education (PHSE) and Citizenship in Years 7 to 11. Provision for PHSE lacks cohesion and arrangements for sex and relationship education are underdeveloped. The interests and talents of girls are less well nurtured than those of boys. All students are required to study three single science subjects in Years 10 and 11. This restricts choice for those students who have wider interests. The school does not make good use of students' views about the curriculum in order to bring about improvement.

The school offers a limited range of enrichment activities which confines students' capacity to take responsibility, share and benefit from experiences in the local and wider community. Too many extra-curricular activities are offered at times which are not appropriate for the many students who travel long distances to school. Progression routes are clear and explained to parents and students so they can make informed choices.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory quality of care for students. Arrangements to ensure health and safety are in place; procedures for child protection are established and understood by all staff. Safeguarding procedures are adequate and meet requirements. Students with additional needs receive effective support. The Inclusion Centre is well regarded and open to all students. It provides a good range of additional services to extend and enhance students' learning skills. The school's system for tracking individual progress has improved since the previous inspection, but overall remains underdeveloped. Students are more routinely involved in evaluating their own work and progress. They know how well they are doing; however, academic guidance to help them to improve their work is better in some subjects than others. Parents are well informed about their child's progress and 'postcards' sent home celebrate particular achievements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Since the last inspection leadership has been ineffectual. Consequently, progress in driving forward improvements has been either slow or non-existent. A failure to direct and draw on the management potential of subject leaders has resulted in too much variation in the effectiveness of the school's work. Nevertheless, staff morale remains high; there is a strong commitment amongst staff to move the school forward.

Self-evaluation is neither robust nor sufficiently self-critical. The school's assessment of the current situation is over-optimistic. Although priorities for improvement are accurately identified there is a lack of shared understanding of key weaknesses and how they can be tackled. The school has received external guidance to help identify strengths and weaknesses; some of this has not been acted upon. More intensive support is required if the school is to have the capacity for necessary improvement.

Senior managers have been greatly occupied by managing the consequences of the declining student numbers and a deficit budget. This has meant that there has been insufficient focus on improving the quality of provision and raising achievement. Following a period of financial uncertainty, the school's budget has now been stabilised and finances are managed carefully.

Initiatives intended to address weaknesses identified at the last inspection are still at an early stage of implementation. The monitoring of teaching and learning remains underdeveloped. Performance management systems are not fit for purpose. Senior staff and a high proportion of middle managers have not had their performance reviews. The deputy headteacher has made some headway in embedding quality assurance and review processes. However, her progress has recently been compromised by day-to-day operational matters due to the long term absence of senior staff.

The governing body has not been sufficiently involved in self-evaluation and quality assurance processes. Governors are insufficiently well informed about the school's performance; they have not been rigorous in holding senior managers to account. The school's race equality policy requires updating and there has been no evaluation of the impact of this policy on the experiences of staff and students at the school. Whilst community cohesion is promoted within school, too little has been done to plan ways in which the school's duty can be promoted more widely beyond the school gates. The school has been slow to reach out to, and actively involve, other communities in its work and has yet to evaluate its impact on community cohesion.

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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	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
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	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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 learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	4	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for your very warm welcome. You made a good impression and we found you polite and helpful. Some of your parents returned a questionnaire; this was also very helpful as I was also able to take their views into account. I looked very carefully at a number of aspects of your school and found that the current provision of education is not good enough. I have decided that your school needs 'special measures'. This means that your school will receive extra help and inspectors will make regular visits to check that improvements are taking place. I also recognised some positive features about your school, not least how well your teachers help you to develop as responsible individuals. They work very hard to ensure your well-being. This means that you are particularly well placed to help turn the school around and make it the exceptional school it should be.

I found that girls and those of you capable of getting A*/A grades generally make slow progress in Years 10 and 11 and consequently underachieve in your GCSE examinations. Your results in mathematics and science are not as good as they should be, whilst in other subjects, such as drama and music you excel. In order to make sure you all achieve your full potential I have asked the school to do the following:

- Ensure that all leaders and managers are better placed to bring about faster improvement.
- Work with your teachers to ensure that all of the teaching is as good as that in the best lessons.
- Improve the curriculum so you get receive your full entitlement and have opportunities to extend your interests and skills, especially in Key Stage 4.
- Use information about your progress more effectively so that help can be provided quickly if your progress slows down.

I have also asked the school to be more thorough in evaluating whether or not school policies make any difference to the experiences of students, staff and parents from different faiths, ethnic and social backgrounds.