

Meole Brace School Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123573
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	327942
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Clive Kempton HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	959
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Martin Smith
Headteacher	Hilary Burke
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 November 2005
School address	Longden Road Shrewsbury Shropshire SY3 9DW
Telephone number	01743 235961
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School website address	www.meolebrace.com

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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons, and held meetings with staff, students, parents, governors and a group of outside professionals associated with the school. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's own self-evaluation of its performance; the school improvement plan; the report of the school improvement partner and other documentation relating to specific features of the provision. Inspectors also scrutinised 117 parental questionnaires and 47 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the rigour of school and departmental development planning
- the improvement the school has made since the last inspection in 2005
- the reasons for the variation in standards between subjects at Key Stage 4
- how the school manages students who arrive at other than the normal times of admission.

Information about the school

The school has reduced in size since the last inspection due to local demography. However, its popularity with parents is now increasing year on year. A growing number of students join the school at times other than the normal time of admission. The headteacher and the leadership team have been appointed in the last three years. The school has achieved the following awards:

- Specialist Science College Status 2003, re-designated in 2007
- Eco-Schools Bronze Flag
- Healthy Schools Award
- Artsmark Silver
- Sportsmark Silver
- Safer Schools Accreditation
- Investors in People
- Educational Business Partnership Award 2007
- Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSIS)

Further information about the school

	School's figures	School's figures compared with other schools
School size	959	Average
Free school meals	5.3%	Below average
Proportions of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	18.8%	Average
Proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups	4.2%	Below average
Proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language	1.2%	Below average
Proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	1.3%	Below average

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school that is growing in popularity, where students attain above average standards that are improving year on year. Science college status has been a key driver in raising whole-school standards of attainment. The headteacher and senior leadership team have successfully pulled the school and the local community together in a determined effort to improve outcomes for students. They have a good capacity to sustain this improvement because of the impressive progress they have made since the last inspection. The weaker features identified with the school are the extent to which students eat healthily; the lack of measurable outcomes in its improvement planning, especially for specific groups of students; and clarity of exactly what students are expected to learn in each lesson. The outstanding features of the school are:

- the support, care and guidance it provides for students
- the exceptional progress made by students at an early stage of learning English
- the communication with parents
- the students' contribution to the community
- the development of students' workplace and other skills
- developing partnerships with other providers.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance development planning at all levels to include more measurable success criteria, especially for the attainment of different groups of students, so that governors, staff, parents and students can measure the progress made.
- Ensure that all lessons have clear and measurable learning objectives so that staff and students are aware of the learning gains.
- In collaboration with parents, encourage students to adopt healthy eating habits.

How well does the school meet the needs of individuals and different groups of pupils?

2

Students achieve well because they engage effectively with their learning. This is particularly so when activities enable them to participate as much as possible. They

do this enthusiastically and work well with others. As a result, their enjoyment of learning is good, and because they are interested in their work, they are well motivated. Many find lessons 'exciting' and in science, for example, relish the opportunities to investigate through experiment. Students' attainment on entry to the school is just above average. They make good progress in their learning and leave with above average standards of attainment. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good gains in literacy and numeracy skills on entry to the school and this helps them to make good progress in other subjects. Students new to the school who are at an early stage of learning English settle quickly and make outstanding progress. Virtually all students are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Students' contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding. Significant numbers of students volunteer for community projects designed to help the elderly and disadvantaged. Others develop excellent leadership and organisational skills through their effective work with younger students and local primary schools. Most students say they feel safe in school, and a number of systems to help this are run very effectively by the students themselves. Although many students take part in exercise and cycle to school to keep fit, far fewer adopt healthy eating habits when in school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	2
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	3
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
Pupils' attendance and punctuality	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

Typically, lessons are organised and managed well. A purposeful atmosphere and good relationships encourage students to be positive and enthusiastic. The highest quality teaching challenges students with demanding tasks and probing questioning which develop and deepen students' understanding. Their keenness to ask and answer questions shows their confidence as learners. Lesson planning does not always show clearly enough the intended outcomes for the students' learning. In a

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

minority of lessons, teachers do not engage students actively enough.

The school assesses students' progress frequently. Students know their targets and current standards, and understand that teachers will raise individual targets when appropriate. Marking is of variable quality. The best gives students clear 'tips' for improvement, but some marking gives them little guidance.

The school has modified the curriculum so that it provides well for lower attaining students and those with specific learning needs as well as for the gifted and talented. The student support centre provides outstanding support for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school provides a secure and safe environment for students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment and academic guidance	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The dynamic headteacher provides good leadership in creating a vision that is focused on raising standards and making a difference to students' lives. The new leadership team supports her well and together they have monitored outcomes extensively in the school. Good support is provided for departments where outcomes are more variable, largely due to staffing issues. Senior managers' own self-evaluation of the strengths and priorities for development in the school is accurate. These identified priorities lead to detailed school and departmental improvement plans. However, there is currently insufficient focus in these plans on measurable success criteria for different groups of students to enable the governors and managers at all levels to fully judge the impact of their actions.

Since the last inspection in 2005, improvements have been made to:

- reward students for their effort in class
- develop a support centre within the school for vulnerable students
- develop a system to track students' progress
- student behaviour
- inspect each department annually
- inform parents more often about their child's progress
- raise standards of attainment to an all-time high for the school.

Governors have an accurate picture of the school and its local community, and this enables them to challenge the school leaders with increasing rigour. A clear testimony of the impact of the new leadership was provided by other professionals who work with the school, such as local primary headteachers, the vicar, representatives from the local authority and chosen charities. All report on:

- the warm welcome
- how open the school staff are to new ideas
- the dedication of all adults
- the school's enhanced profile in the local community and good promotion of community partnerships.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Monitoring, evaluating and planning for improvement to outcomes for pupils	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	2
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision making about matters relating to learning and well-being	1
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and appreciate the improved communication systems established over the last two years. Many feel they have a role to play in shaping the provision through the Meole Improvement Group, established to involve parents more in decision making. Of the 117 questionnaires returned as part of the inspection, the majority of parents who responded (92) were very positive. They reported that their child enjoys school, feels safe, makes good progress and that they think the school is well led. The responses prompting most concern for some parents were the extent to which the school helps their child maintain a healthy lifestyle (11) and helps them support their child's learning (10).

One parent accurately summed up the school as, 'a friendly, supportive, encouraging and inclusive school'.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2006-7, 14% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2006-7, 46% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing for its pupils suitably. In 2006-7, 34% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2006-7, 6% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

21 November 2008



Dear Students

Inspection of Meole Brace School Science College,
Shrewsbury, SY3 9DW

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school in November. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection and what the school could do to get even better.

You and your parents think you go to a good school and we agree. It is getting better every year and more and more students want to come to Meole Brace School. We think that some aspects of your school are outstanding, such as the support, guidance and care the school provides for you; the communication with your parents; the way you are prepared for your future lives; and the way you make contributions to the school and local community. You obviously enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in your good attendance, positive attitudes, and behaviour in class and around the school.

You work hard and most of you get good grades in your tests, due to the dedication and hard work of your teachers. Those of you who need extra help get good support from the LINC and other adults. Your headteacher is really good and leads the school well. She has improved the school by getting everyone to work together, including your parents. You are generally kind to each other and respect each other's views. The older students look out for the younger students. It was good to talk to Jean and Joe, your head girl and boy, and hear how they tell the staff your ideas for how the school could get even better. The science college is having a major impact in improving your science lessons and the science experiences of some of the junior school pupils. They are starting the school with higher standards in science now. The science college events, such as the Big Day, sound like really good fun and attract large numbers of visitors.

In order to get even better, I have suggested that your headteacher and senior staff do the following things:

- set clear targets in their written plans for improving the school so that they can measure how well you are doing and let you know
- make sure that teachers tell you exactly what you are going to learn in each lesson and check that you have learned it
- help you eat more healthily.

Best wishes

Clive Kempton HMI
Her Majesty's Inspector

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