

Blythe Bridge High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124396
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328128
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif 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 (total)	1001
Sixth form	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Parry
Headteacher	Shan Schanda
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2006
School address	Cheadle Road Blythe Bridge ST11 9PW
Telephone number	01782 392519
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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

Blythe Bridge High is a popular sports specialist school with a growing sixth form. Almost all students come from a White British background, with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of students eligible for free school meals and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well below the national average. The school achieved its sports specialist status in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Blythe Bridge is a good school, where all are committed to developing an inclusive learning community. The headteacher has been central to bringing staff together as a team. This is helping to drive up achievement and standards within a caring environment. Students behave well because of the school's good care and support arrangements in which staff work closely with students and provide an ordered, safe and secure environment for them to work in.

The outstanding curriculum provides activities and courses that meet the needs of all its students and greatly broadens their horizons. The school's recently gained sports specialist status, alongside its focus on English, is successfully raising standards in subjects such as physical education and modern foreign languages. The range and variety of courses, clubs and activities in the visual and performing arts have significantly expanded and are enjoyed by students and the local community. Both parents and students spoke highly of their recent production of 'High School Musical'.

Students' overall achievement and standards are good because teaching is good, with some outstanding features. All teachers are specialists and have good subject knowledge. In the best lessons seen, teachers share their enthusiasm and there is a creative buzz in the classroom. This leads to high expectations and positive attitudes. Lessons are well planned, challenge students and effectively accelerate their learning. The good, and sometimes outstanding, progress made by some students has been well supported by a number of recent developments. For example, the systematic and rigorous monitoring of lessons and the range of techniques developed through the school's sports specialist status enable students to become independent learners and to work with others to solve problems. However, the senior leadership team recognise that there are inconsistencies in planning and that teaching does not always fully engage and challenge students. This arises from a lack of effective planning and too much teacher input, which results in some students becoming passive or misbehaving and this adversely affects learning.

The school greatly values and includes all students in the work of the school. Consequently, students make a significant contribution through, for example, their roles as coaches, leaders and mentors. Students in Years 10 to 13 regularly run sports and language classes for young and adult learners; for example, some Year 6 pupils are taught basic French, Spanish and Russian by Year 11 and Year 10 students. A lesson observed was judged to be outstanding because pupils were fully engaged and learning was made fun. By the end of the lessons, pupils were able to hold simple conversations in all three languages. One pupil in Year 6 said, 'I love coming here every week because it's fun and a great place, with lots of interesting things to do.'

Students' personal development and well-being are good, enabling students to develop a strong sense of responsibility. Students adopt healthy lifestyles and their positive contribution to the community is outstanding. They enjoy school, and younger students talk with enthusiasm and appreciation of the care given to them by sixth-form students, who act as mentors. They feel that they can speak confidentially and openly, and give many examples of how they have been helped to form friendships and develop good relationships. They also spoke very positively about being able to settle quickly in Year 7 because they knew some of the teachers and students who regularly visited their primary school.

This inclusive approach does not happen by chance. The headteacher's vision and her passion that every child matters continue to drive the school forward. The very effective senior leaders

monitor the work of the school closely. They are self-critical and not daunted by some of the difficulties they have had to face. Senior leaders have responded well to the issues raised in the last inspection and are well placed to meet the challenges in the future. The school recognises the need to develop the roles of middle leaders further so that they are able to hold staff in their departments to account. They also recognise the need to build upon the successful improvements in the main school into the sixth form. The school offers good value for money and has an outstanding capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory, with many good elements. The fall in the number on roll in 2008 encouraged the leadership team to take prompt action. These actions have proved to be effective as numbers are predicted to rise this year. This is due in part to the school's innovative approach to the curriculum. It has been adjusted to enable students to consolidate their learning at the end of Key Stage 4 before moving on to advanced courses. Some students start their courses at the end of Year 11. Developments in age 16 to 19 provision have been lagging behind those at 14 to 16 but are now catching up and plans are in place for further major developments. Students enjoy attending school, are enthusiastic about the increasing opportunities and have very positive attitudes to learning. Personal development is good; students are excellent role models for younger students and pupils in the local primary schools. They have many opportunities to take responsibilities, for example as peer mentors, leaders, coaches or in supporting the school council. They are well supported by their tutors in applying for university and by the Connexions service in preparing for employment.

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average. Although standards fell in 2007/08, they are beginning to rise because of good teaching. The school's current data indicates standards are set to rise in 2009. This improving picture is supported by lessons observed during the inspection, where progress made by students was judged to be good. Leadership and management of the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Leaders have taken decisive action to tackle the weaknesses identified through self-evaluation. Care, guidance and support have improved and are good. The rigorous monitoring and tracking systems, which have proved very helpful in Years 7 to 11, are now in place in the sixth form, supported by tutors to provide continuity.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teaching and learning are consistently good or better by sharing the good practice that exists in the school and focusing more on students' learning.
- Ensure the sixth form is given a high priority in the next stage of the school's development planning, building upon the successful improvements in the main school.
- Develop the role of the middle leadership team to enable them to hold staff in their departments to account for the progress of students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with variable standards that range from broadly average to those that are above average for the current Year 7. In 2008, students in Year 11 made good progress, reaching above average standards by the end of Year 11, with 57% of students achieving at least 5 GCSEs graded A* to C including English and mathematics. The school's current data

and lessons seen show an improving trend. All students make good progress relative to their starting points because of good teaching, good behaviour and the broad curriculum which meets their needs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress because of the targeted support they receive. The school has sharpened its systems for monitoring and setting clearer targets which inform students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. It uses its detailed knowledge of what students have attained in their primary schools to set initial individual targets. The school's current data and lessons seen by inspectors indicate that students are on track to meet their targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students grow into mature and confident individuals who have a clear understanding of what they want to achieve. They show a strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, particularly in understanding the cultures and beliefs of other people. Students enjoy school as reflected in their good attendance. They especially appreciate the range of sport and practical lessons such as music and design and technology which the school offers both during and after school. Students have an excellent understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles. They show this particularly through joining in with many sporting activities, much of these in their own time. Students feel safe and behave safely. They behave well in and around the school, and are considerate, open and friendly. However, a small minority do not always take enough responsibility for their own behaviour when they are not supervised, for example in the corridors during break and lunchtime. Students make an excellent contribution to the community, particularly within school, through their roles as champions, leaders and mentors. The work of Year 10 to 13 students with primary schools and other young people and adults within the community, much of it in their own time, is outstanding. They willingly take on the many leadership roles on offer, which is having a very positive impact on their self-esteem and growing maturity. The peer mentoring scheme is especially effective in helping students, which is why so many of them show remarkable insight into the concerns and difficulties of others. With their good basic skills, strong team spirit and good understanding of the world of work, students are well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good teaching and learning, evident across the school, is an improvement since the last inspection. The school has worked hard to make lessons more interesting and continues to strive to improve the guidance given to students on how they can improve their work even further. Where teaching is good, teachers plan a range of relevant activities that engage students' interest and curiosity. Teachers explain ideas clearly at the start of lessons, make their objectives clear and ensure tasks are well matched to students' capabilities. They challenge, probe and extend students' understanding through searching questions. Lessons proceed at a lively pace with no time wasted. Consequently, students work hard with enthusiasm and commitment. Teachers' analysis and use of assessment information in day-to-day teaching has become more consistent across the school. They are now more able to meet the needs of individual students and to support them in becoming more independent learners. Resources are used effectively

and classroom assistants are deployed well to support students who find learning difficult. The school recognises, however, that this good practice is not yet consistent across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school has made significant improvements in its curriculum provision since the last inspection. The outstanding curriculum stimulates, challenges and engages students at all levels. It underpins the good achievement by building successfully on students' prior attainment. This provision has been further enhanced through the school's sports specialist status which has enabled the curriculum to extend beyond the school into the wider community. Local employment opportunities, which have changed in recent years, are reflected in courses such as health and social care, construction, business administration and finance. Students' horizons are stretched further by a wealth of educational visits and visiting speakers as well as the many extra-curricular activities. Some of these include music, performing arts and sports, which extend students' interests and aspirations. Students in Key Stage 3 are also benefiting from a thematic approach adopted across a range of subjects, for example in design technology and art. This has resulted in highly innovative project work and very effective partnerships between various subjects. Similarly, students in Key Stage 4 receive access to a very broad and diverse range of academic and vocational pathway courses which suit their individual needs exceptionally well. This includes strong opportunities for vocational training at a local college or work placements, and extended options such as leadership awards, digital photography and music.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Child protection procedures are secure and health and safety arrangements are robust. Safeguarding arrangements meet government requirements. The school cares for its vulnerable students very well by making good use of external and specialist agencies to promote their welfare, when the needs arise, through its assisted learning department. Students are able, and encouraged, to self-refer, which is much appreciated by them. This is reflected in the good outcomes for students with a wide range of needs, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Assessment and tracking procedures are good. Students are set challenging targets. Progress against targets is monitored rigorously and those that fall behind are given additional support. The school recognises that its tutorial system is not used effectively or consistently by all staff to support students' personal development and extend their learning. This is currently under review to ensure that it better meets the needs of its students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's highly effective leadership has secured significant school improvement since the last inspection. Her clear vision and a sense of purpose have brought the staff together. She provides a coherent vision for learning, which is understood and shared by staff, students, parents and governors. Her astute management of resources, 'getting much from little', particularly as the school works through the deficit budget she inherited, is to be commended. She is ably supported by a strong senior leadership team who have together responded to challenges with determination since the last inspection.

The school's use of monitoring and evaluation has provided a firm foundation for more recent improvements such as developing the skills of middle leaders. This is having a positive impact on overall achievement and standards, behaviour and the curriculum. The middle leaders work well together and recognise that they now need to hold their staff fully to account for the progress students make. The school has worked particularly well with students in helping develop their skills to become effective champions, leaders and mentors; consequently, they make an excellent contribution to the very effective partnership with other schools. Their work in promoting sports and languages to local primary schools and their voluntary work are impressive.

The governors work hard and provide the headteacher and the school with good support and challenge. Through their growing understanding of data, governors are in a strong position to challenge the school, helping it to raise standards further and improve on the good achievement. Although a significant majority of the parents praise the work of the school and are supportive of all that it does, there are some who feel that the school could do more to improve on communication with parents. The leadership team have agreed to take appropriate action to improve further the already good communication with parents. The school's promotion of community cohesion is good, with some outstanding features. The school has excellent working relationships with its local primary schools, local community, and national and international links. Students spoke with excitement of their recent visitors from the Singapore government. The school recognises that they now need to evaluate fully the impact of this work with certain parts of the community.

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

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/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	1	
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	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 learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
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	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

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

15 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Blythe Bridge High School, Stoke-on-Trent, ST11 9PW Thank you very much for the warm welcome when we came to inspect your school. We agree with you and the majority of your parents that Blythe Bridge is a good school. We were impressed with your attitude to learning, the respect you show each other and how well you behaved most of the time. We very much enjoyed speaking with you and seeing you at work. Blythe Bridge is a happy place, where all students are cared for well. We were particularly impressed with how much work you were doing through your roles as coaches for various sports activities, when representing your school in the wider community, and as leaders and mentors supporting younger students, as well as pupils in your local primary schools. Staff work hard to ensure that you are successful and grow in confidence, preparing you well for the future. Older students spoke of how the school has improved in the last three years, particularly the curriculum and the range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer. You were particularly pleased with your specialist sports status and the contribution it is making to your outlook on healthy lifestyles. The progress you are making is good. Standards reached last year were above the national average. This is because the teaching has improved; however, we have asked the school to make sure that teaching is consistently good and outstanding across the whole school and that teachers make sure that students are learning. We have also asked the school to help the middle leaders to hold teachers in their departments to account for the progress you make.

Your local, national and international links are making you more aware of different cultures and how people live. We were pleased to hear that you get involved in other areas that concern you, such as raising funds for charity, and that the school encourages you to pursue your interests.

The leadership and management are good. Mrs Schanda and the staff are always looking for new ideas to make education at Blythe Bridge even more enjoyable. Sixth formers and students in Years 10 and 11 make an important contribution to the school and enjoy the opportunity to work with other schools. We decided that the sixth form is currently satisfactory, although we saw improvements taking place already, particularly in the range of opportunities on offer which is already attracting more students to stay on. We have asked the headteacher to make sure that the sixth form has a high priority in the next stages of school development, building on the successful improvement in the main school.

You too can help by continuing to work hard, being punctual to your lessons and by taking greater responsibility for your behaviour at all times.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Rashida Sharif

Her Majesty's Inspector