

Leek High Specialist Technology School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124406
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328130
Inspection date	21 January 2009
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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	425
Sixth form	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen Murfin
Headteacher	J Samuel
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2006
School address	Springfield Road Leek ST13 6EU
Telephone number	01538 483036
Fax number	01538 483052

Age group	13–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- The overall effectiveness of the sixth form.
- The significant elements of the curriculum, care, guidance and support which the school judge to be outstanding.
- The strengths of leadership and management which have led to sustained improvement.

Evidence was gathered from: the school's self-evaluation; achievement and attainment information; observation of lessons; scrutiny of documentation provided by the school; observation of the school at work; discussion with senior managers; talking to governors and students; and an analysis of parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Leek High Specialist Technology School is smaller than most secondary schools. Nearly all students are White British. The proportion of students claiming free school meals is below average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including statements of special educational needs is well above average. The school gained specialist technology status in September 2004. Most of the students come either from a local area of some social and economic deprivation or from isolated rural areas.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Leek High Specialist Technology School is a good school where individual care and support enable students to achieve well. This is an inclusive school where the personal development and well-being of students is given high priority. The school has worked very effectively to improve behaviour in lessons and around school and it is now good. Students develop very well both morally, socially, spiritually and culturally. Their personal, social and cultural education provides good opportunities to learn about wider issues. Students said they enjoy their learning and this is reflected in good attendance. There is increasing success from the support given to those who would otherwise refuse to attend. Any instances of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students say they feel safe in school and know whom to turn to if they need comfort or help. They do not always play a sufficiently strong role in making school decisions, for example through an elected school council. However, there are good relationships between the staff and students and much feedback is gained in this way and through regular surveys. Students make an important contribution to the community by fund raising and playing an active role in such events as the technology exhibition.

Achievement and standards are good overall. Students enter the school at 13 years of age with broadly average prior attainment. Students follow the condensed Key Stage 3 curriculum and two thirds of them take the national tests in middle school prior to joining Leek High. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have continued to rise and the percentage of students obtaining five A* to C grades at GCSE has risen from 44% in 2006 to 63% in 2008. The percentage of students also obtaining an A* to C grade in English and mathematics has increased significantly to be above the national average. All students leave school with a qualification and this prepares them well for future education, employment or training. The proportion of students achieving an A* to A grade is improving. There are no significant variations between groups of students. The school reflects the national trend and girls do better than boys, but in 2008 boys were only marginally behind. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress due to the very good support and care they receive. Performance in specialist subjects is improving with strong performance in the single sciences and information and communication technology (ICT). The excellent personalised curriculum, improvements in teaching and learning and outstanding aspects of care and support have contributed to the improvements in achievement.

The good teaching and learning ensure lessons are well planned and take into account the learning needs of individual students. There has been a consistent whole-school focus on professional development alongside the development of leaders in teaching and learning. Teachers show a good level of subject knowledge and in most lessons very effective use is made of a range of stimulating activities and tasks. Lessons encourage the active involvement of students through group work or well structured individual tasks. Behaviour is managed well in lessons. Specialist technology status has enabled the school to utilise ICT to best effect in a number of lessons, to aid learning and improve students' achievement across all subjects.

The outstanding curriculum is very broad and meets the needs of individual students well. The well established links between the school and local colleges ensure that a broad range of academic, vocational and work-related opportunities are available for students in this small school. Different pathways are continually being developed, with the introduction of a construction course in September 2008. The school works particularly well with students who may become disaffected from learning, using an individualised approach to engage them in

education and training. The school has created opportunities for all students to enter some examinations early with impressive results in English. All students take a design and technology option in Year 10 and 11. The most able mathematicians take statistics and study an AS module in Year 11. Take-up in modern foreign languages has improved to 45% in Year 10. The range of extra-curricular activities is wide, with over 100 students taking part in the House Performing Arts competition. Participation in sport is also high, enhanced by the excellent facilities, and demonstrates students' good understanding of the need to take regular exercise to maintain and improve their health. There has been a positive impact of specialist technology status on the curriculum and in students' enjoyment of learning in extra-curricular activities, for example the engineering club continues to attract students, some of whom compete successfully in the national green power race car competition.

Care and support are outstanding, particularly for vulnerable students in the school. The multi-agency support base is a real strength of the school. Large numbers of students are referred or self-refer and receive high quality individual support. There is a strong pastoral team which consists of close working between learning mentors, tutors and senior staff. Safeguarding procedures are comprehensive and robust. There is good provision for careers advice and students are prepared well for their future lives. The school has developed effective systems for tracking student progress. However, the school lacks a consistent approach to the marking of student work and ensuring students know what they need to do to improve. Assessment practice is variable across the school and the setting of personal targets remains uneven. These weaker aspects result in care, guidance and support being good rather than outstanding.

Leadership and management are good with a clear direction being set by a strong senior leadership team. This has led to sustained improvement in achievement. The school has strengthened its monitoring and evaluation across the school. It is clear about its strengths and the further improvements needed. Subject leaders provide a very detailed analysis of examination results and use the views of learners to gather information about the subject which are then actioned. There are clear levels of accountability. The school sets itself challenging and aspirational targets and thus has a good capacity to improve with its demonstrable track record of effective actions. The strength of the work around community cohesion is the strong focus on the local, United Kingdom and European community. Global links are less developed and limit students' greater knowledge and understanding of the wider world.

Governors are well informed about the work of the school and take an active interest in all areas of the school's work. They provide a good challenge to the school to ensure it continues to improve and take part in subject discussions with leaders and managers, asking searching questions about performance. Governors are very involved in decision making and the strategic development of the school.

The percentage of parents who responded to the questionnaires was very low, at 10%. There was a mixed response from parents, with about half being very positive about the quality of education the school provides. The other half raised some concerns about a range of issues, including the quality of behaviour in the school. However, during the inspection, behaviour in lessons and around the school was good. The general concerns that were raised in the questionnaires, including the way in which the school seeks the views of parents and carers, were discussed with the headteacher.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The standards reached by sixth form students in their GCE AS and A-level courses are below average but improving. The progress students make is now good due to the very effective leadership and management of the sixth form. An enthusiastic and knowledgeable leader has recently been appointed. She has already launched strategies that have improved the achievement and expectations of the students. A number of actions have shown sufficient impact to ensure that the sixth form is providing a better quality of education. Pockets of underachievement have been tackled and during the inspection students were seen to be making good progress in lessons. Overall the quality of teaching is good and there are examples where it is outstanding, such as in English and mathematics. As a consequence far more students are applying for university this year. There is also a low drop-out rate from courses and attendance is good. An increasing number of students from Year 11 are staying into the sixth form. There is a good range of academic and vocational courses and extra-curricular activities on offer which are supported by effective links with local colleges. Care and support are good although the overall quality of care, support and guidance is weakened by insufficient regular guidance and feedback to inform the students about their personal progress and to discuss, record and review their personal learning targets. Students make good use of their private study time but there are fewer opportunities for independent research in some subjects, which limits achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that in the sixth form there are regular reviews with students about their progress and appropriate guidance is given on reaching individual targets.
- Use the best practice in subjects to ensure marking, assessment and the process of setting targets consistently provide students with clear guidance on how to improve their work.

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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	2
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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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	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?	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	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	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**

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Leek High Specialist Technology School, Leek, ST13 6EU

My colleague and I really enjoyed our visit to your school. We enjoyed talking with some of you about your work and finding out about your views of the school. You go to a good school. These are our main findings.

- The standards you achieve in examinations are good and you are making good progress from the time you join to when you leave the school.
- Your personal development and well-being are given high priority in the school.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school has improved.
- The quality of teaching in the school is good.
- The school provides an outstanding broad curriculum, which is appropriate to your needs, and with very good links to local colleges.
- Staff provide outstanding care, support and guidance; the multi-agency centre is very impressive.
- The quality of the education provided in the sixth form is now good and continues to improve, with more of you thinking about going to university.
- The school's leaders, governors and committed staff have been very successful in providing you with a good quality of education.

We have asked senior leaders to make the following improvements.

- Ensure that in the sixth form there are regular reviews with you about your progress and appropriate guidance is given on reaching your individual targets.
- Use the best practice in subjects to ensure marking, assessment and the setting of targets consistently provide you with clear guidance on how to improve your work.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh

Her Majesty's Inspector