

Walton High School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 124416 |
| Local Authority | Staffordshire |
| Inspection number | 328134 |
| Inspection dates | 26–27 March 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | David Cox |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 1287 |
| Sixth form | 264 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Ben Rowell |
| Headteacher | Neil Finlay |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 March 2006 |
| School address | The Rise Walton-on-the-Hill Stafford ST17 0LJ |
| Telephone number | 01785 356300 |
| Fax number | 01785 356339 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Walton High School is a larger than average secondary school. The school is part of the post-16 Stafford Collegiate of sixth forms and Stafford College. Students from other schools also attend the sixth form. The school has specialist status in science. Almost all students are from White British backgrounds, although students from many different ethnic groups are represented within the school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The new headteacher took up post in January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Walton High School provides its students with a good education. Students receive good care, guidance and support. Many parents comment enthusiastically on the way their children have been supported through difficult times and students speak of the atmosphere of safety, security and care that the school provides.

From the start, students are taught well. This leads to them achieving well overall and attaining standards that are high compared to the national average by the end of Year 11. Standards are continuing to rise. A greater proportion of students now leave school with higher grade GCSEs and/or vocational qualifications because of a more relevant curriculum. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive effective support and are enabled to make similar progress to that of others in their class. Students achieve particularly well in science as a result of the additional investment in professional development provided through being a specialist science college.

An active school council presents students' views to senior leaders and governors who value the comments received. Students feel secure in school and are sensitive to the needs of others. They are mature, considerate and thoughtful. Bullying and racism are notable by their absence. Behaviour is good. However, a small minority of boys are easily distracted in lessons that do not motivate them fully. Students are happy at the school and enjoy the many enrichment activities provided. The wide ranging activities programme, as well as developing students' specific skills in areas such as sports and music, helps them to develop good social skills through the many opportunities to interact together. Students know how to stay safe and healthy so are well prepared to take advantage of all the school offers. Good development of basic skills and access to good advice mean students are well prepared for their later lives. Students contribute well to the school and wider community through activities such as their school council and charity fund-raising. They have a good understanding of sustainable development, particularly through fieldwork enquiry and research. Students have a good understanding of the wider world, although they are not always aware of the different cultures represented in Britain.

The quality of teaching is continuing to improve because of the good professional development and the clear focus on improving students' learning. There is some outstanding teaching, for example in science, physical education, art and French, where students are encouraged to do their best. There are examples of teachers using assessment information well to ensure tasks in lessons match precisely with students' needs. However, this is not consistently the case in all lessons and occasionally work set does not enable different groups of students to progress as well as they could. In some lessons, teachers do not make full use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources to boost students' learning. As a result, opportunities are sometimes lost to fully inspire and motivate students, especially the boys. Students benefit from a good curriculum that provides a wide range of courses and extra-curricular activities that meet students' needs effectively. Sixth form students have access to an excellent range of curricular opportunities through the local collegiate partnership.

The headteacher provides good leadership and management. He is supported well by other senior leaders. Development plans are good and reflect the shared vision of the school community in the school's work and the determination to continue to improve provision for students. The school's view of its strengths and areas for development is accurate, arising from

effective self-evaluation. The systems for monitoring the work of the school are generally good. However, the school does not always analyse, with sufficient rigour, the information gained to ensure that there is consistent good practice in all areas. The school's specialist status has provided additional resources to the benefit of both students in this school and in partner schools and the wider community. The school has a good track record of improvement since the previous inspection and is therefore well placed for further development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students' achievement in the sixth form is good. Students' standards on entry to the sixth form are wide ranging but broadly average. By the time they leave, students attain standards that are above average overall and rising steadily. Students enjoy their experience of the sixth form, although the study facilities in the sixth form base are limited and restrict the development of independent learning skills. Students' personal development is good. Students help to drive and evaluate a range of initiatives within the school, and their work in ensuring that their views are heard across the school is very good. Many take on roles of responsibility both within the school and the wider community, for example chairing the school council, working as mentors to younger students and working in nearby primary schools.

Teaching is good and relationships between staff and students are positive. Students have very good attitudes towards their learning. The retention rate on courses is very high so that many students progress on to higher education. The outstanding curriculum provides a wide range of courses and the strong local collegiate partnership has helped to broaden the range of courses still further to meet the needs of all students. The good enrichment programme helps to deliver key skills for life so that students gain a good sense of economic awareness.

The care, guidance and support the students receive are good and help them to make good progress and well-informed choices for the future. The tracking of individual students' progress is now carried out more rigorously than previously and effective support is provided to ensure that students have a clear understanding of what is expected in examinations. The sixth form is well led and the day-to-day management is enhanced by the supportive work of the head of sixth form and the team of tutors.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards of attainment for all students by ensuring teachers make more effective use of assessment data when matching work to the needs of students.
- Ensure teachers make more effective use of ICT resources to inspire and motivate all students, particularly the boys.
- Ensure that information gained from the school's monitoring activities is analysed rigorously to ensure practice is consistently good in all areas of provision.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

When students join the school, their skills and knowledge are above the expected level for 11-year-olds. Students' achievement is good and, by the time they leave the school at the end of Year 11, standards of attainment overall are high in comparison with the national average. Standards are continuing to rise because the quality of teaching has improved. Virtually all students leave school with five or more grades at GCSE with most attaining higher grades. This

demonstrates how inclusive the school is and how well the curriculum is tailored to meet the needs of students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of good teaching combined with a personalised support programme. Students are articulate and display good literacy skills. Standards in mathematics are also rising rapidly as a result of various strategies supported by the school's specialist college status.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are a positive aspect of the school's work. Students are confident and develop a good range of skills that will help them in the future. Behaviour is good, attendance is well above average and students enjoy being at school. Staff and students work together to support and comfort students who have worries, and this is strengthened by the school's close work with external agencies that provide specialist support. Students are well informed and good at applying the principles of leading safe and healthy lives with, for example, many of them attending extra-curricular sporting activities. Additionally, a significant number of students take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Students are proud of their achievements as school council members. They worked closely with governors and staff to ensure good water availability for students throughout the school day. Older students act as peer mentors to younger students and participate in community action programmes. Students in different year groups regularly organise fund-raising events in aid of charities. Students' spiritual, moral and social awareness is good. They have a good understanding of the wider world, although their awareness and understanding of the the cultural diversity of Britain are not as well developed as they could be.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The proportion of lessons in which students make good progress has increased since the previous inspection. Teaching is characterised by strong subject knowledge. As a result, most students demonstrate confidence, sustained interest and they are well motivated to learn willingly and purposefully. There are outstanding features, such as the quality of relationships that underpin lessons and the support given to those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which enable them to play a full part in activities. However, within and across subjects, there are occasions when lessons taught are not as good as they could be. For example, planning is sometimes not precise enough and leads to a lack of good use of resources such as the interactive whiteboards. In these circumstances, students become bored and their learning slows. Teachers make too little use of assessment to adjust or refine activities. This results in work not being matched sufficiently to support and challenge different groups of students whose learning slows as a result.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The school offers a wide range of courses including vocational courses and has introduced individualised learning programmes to cater for those identified at greatest risk of disaffection. The success of these courses and programmes has led to improved attendance and a reduction in exclusions. The adult literacy and numeracy courses have been

successful in raising self-esteem and raising standards. The school also provides well for the most able in many areas. In particular, the specialist college status has added to the range of provision in science and also promoted gifted and talented initiatives. The application and use of ICT across the curriculum is good in parts but does not always support students' learning. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being through a strong, work-related curriculum. The good extra-curricular provision reinforces learning effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff know their students well and work effectively with outside agencies, placing the care and well-being of every student at the heart of what they do. The school has robust safeguarding measures in place. Good arrangements for identifying and supporting vulnerable students and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities ensure students' good progress is sustained. Staff understand students' social and emotional needs well and create a welcoming atmosphere that contributes to the students' feelings of safety and their enjoyment of school. Specialist status has enhanced the very good links with primary schools which ensure that students' transition to secondary school is smooth. Academic guidance is satisfactory. New and effective systems for assessing and tracking students' progress have been introduced. However, not all teachers are making sufficient use of the information gained to inform their lesson planning. This results in some students not knowing their targets for improvement or how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management are bringing about sustained improvement in many aspects of the school's work. The headteacher has set a clear direction for the school, which is supported by a committed and able senior leadership team. They work together effectively to evaluate the school's performance and to formulate strategies to bring about improvements. All staff work together well as a team. Governors play an active role in the school and provide good levels of support and challenge. The school now has a good track record of improvement and is therefore well placed for further development. The school has developed monitoring systems that provide for greater accountability in all aspects of the school's provision. These systems have had a positive influence on teaching and learning by enabling the school to put in place well-targeted, continuing professional development provision that is linked to the identified needs of teachers. Whilst the systems for monitoring the work of the school are good, the information gained is not always analysed rigorously enough to achieve consistency in the application of school policies such as the use of assessment or the effective use of ICT.

The school is good at promoting community cohesion. Through its specialist school status, the school has developed links with local business providers, strengthened its links with parents and enhanced its 14 to 16 vocational programme. The school has also widened its links with other local schools. These links have helped to improve the quality of partnership between the school and its local community.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall | 16-19 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|

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 | 1 | 2 |
| 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 | 1 | |
| 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? | 2 | 1 |
| 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**

30 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Walton High School, Stafford, ST17 0LJ

Thank you all very much for making us feel so welcome in your school when we visited recently. We were impressed with you all and the way you were very happy to tell us about your school. You and your parents are rightly proud of Walton. Like you, we think your school is good. There are many good things to report about your school.

Your headteacher and staff want the best for you and are determined that you make as much progress as you can in lessons. Because you enjoy school, attend very well and work hard, you make good progress and reach high standards of attainment. The quality of teaching you receive is good and improving. As a result, you all learn more in your lessons. This is reflected in better achievement and examination results for many of you. Those of you who need extra help make the same good progress because the staff give you lots of attention to help you learn. You have a considerable number of exciting opportunities through visits and fieldwork.

The school helps you to gain confidence in yourselves and you have good attitudes to learning. We saw you working hard in school and enjoying your activities. Your behaviour is good and you are polite to visitors. You show a good awareness of how to stay safe and healthy. You enjoy the many extra activities, such as participating in additional sporting activities. You show consideration for others and are friendly and helpful to each other. We liked the way the school council works to improve your school. You have a good knowledge and understanding of cultures from around the world, although you are less aware of the different cultures represented in Britain.

Those of you who attend the sixth form achieve well and attain above average standards. You work hard, attend very well and complete your courses. You enjoy the good quality teaching and the many enrichment activities that are provided. The sixth form is continuing to improve under the good leadership of the head of sixth form. To make your school even better, we have asked your teachers to do three things.

- Make more effective use of assessment data in order to set demanding work for all of you.
- Make better use of ICT resources in lessons to inspire and motivate you.
- Ensure that those staff who are responsible for checking how well the school is doing, do so more rigorously to ensure consistent good practice in all lessons and activities.

I wish you and the school all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely David Cox

Lead inspector