

Weston Road High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124446
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328143
Inspection dates	15–16 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Mark Sims 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)	966
Sixth form	149
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alex Heaton
Headteacher	Greg Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
School address	Blackheath Lane Stafford ST18 0YG
Telephone number	01785 356700
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Weston Road is an average sized secondary school. It has very recently acquired specialist status as a mathematics and computing college. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is low, as are the percentages of minority ethnic students and students for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of educational needs, is below average. There are collaborative arrangements in the sixth form involving eight institutions. The level of social deprivation in the catchment area is lower than average. Weston Road is an Eco school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a school that is rapidly improving after a period of challenge. It has made significant improvements since the last inspection and has a good capacity to improve further. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory, but it has a number of good features.

The headteacher has worked tirelessly since his appointment to focus the school on raising standards. This has borne fruit in the most recent examination results, which have maintained the trend of rising standards over the last three years. Having had to make some difficult staffing and management decisions, he has established a strong leadership team that shares his vision and direction for the school. Whilst subject leaders and other middle managers have embraced the move to greater accountability through rigorous monitoring, a few inconsistencies remain. The governing body plays a good supporting role in challenging and holding the school to account for its performance and ensuring it gives satisfactory value for money.

Students join the school working at levels in line with national expectations. As they progress through the school, they achieve results in tests at Key Stage 3 and examinations at GCSE that are broadly average. There is a similar profile in the sixth form. Achievement overall is satisfactory. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress in line with their peers. Results at Key Stage 4 in particular have significantly improved in recent years and particularly for boys, who were previously underachieving. The overall proportion of all students getting five good grades (A*-C) at GCSE is in line with the national average, and the figure when English and mathematics are included is high and continuing to rise. The proportion of students who gain higher grades in the sixth form, which was low, is also rising.

The curriculum provides a wide range of courses suitable for different needs, especially in the sixth form, where it is outstanding because of the partnership arrangements with other course providers. It is backed up by many extra-curricular opportunities. However, not enough students get at least five GCSE grades at any grade (A-G) and the percentage not achieving this has increased in recent years. This is because a number of the courses on offer, whilst appropriate for learners, do not lead to GCSE equivalent qualifications.

The drive to raise standards has seen the school focus on improving teaching and learning and a higher proportion than before is now good, although overall it is satisfactory. A more rigorous system of monitoring teaching and learning has led to improvements but the needs of all ability groups are not planned for consistently in lessons. Teachers demonstrate very secure subject knowledge and relationships with pupils are good but, at times, there is too much teacher talk and not enough time for students to work independently.

Personal development is a strength of the school. Students report that they feel safe and secure, a view shared by their parents. Behaviour in and around school is good for the great majority of students with few incidents occurring. Students enjoy their learning and by the time they reach the sixth form they are well-rounded individuals. Students are looked after well in a caring environment where they are seen as individuals. Students have numerous opportunities to contribute to charities, but not enough students take on responsibilities. They receive good support and guidance to move on to the next step, either in lessons or in course and career choices.

It is too early to assess the impact of the school's specialist status as a mathematics and computing college as it was very recently acquired.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

As part of the Stafford Collegiate, the collaboration between eight institutions to offer sixth form provision leads to an outstanding curriculum. The school offers students a very extensive choice between some 40 A level subjects, eight courses leading to vocational qualifications, a general education programme, and also some opportunity to improve GCSE grades. The potential disadvantage of students taught on more than one site is well managed. Transport arrangements between sites are good and students report that moving around develops their confidence and personal responsibility for their own progress. Their attitude to work is good. Many help younger students with their studies and take a lead in charity projects. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as they have many opportunities to learn and reflect following input from outside speakers, visits and, not least, the stimulus from their teachers.

Sixth form tutors provide good care, guidance and support. Students' progress is tracked well through regular assessment against demanding individual targets. Good sixth form management ensures that reliable information is gathered from teachers wherever teaching takes place and consequently students feel known and valued. Sixth form teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with many good lessons provided by school staff. Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory as, overall, students make the expected progress. However, there is evidence from the most recent A-level examination results that more students are reaching higher grades. Retention rates are good and nearly every student who is entered for an A level examination subject passes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning by giving students more opportunities to work independently and ensuring that lesson planning consistently meets the needs of all groups of learners.
- Raise standards further by ensuring that more lower attaining students have the opportunity to pursue GCSE equivalent courses.
- Ensure the quality of leadership of middle managers is consistently good.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When students join the school at the start of Year 7 they are working at levels that are in line with the national average. Key Stage 3 test results are in line with national expectations, as are GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4. Students' achievement overall in the school is satisfactory.

The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades is similar to that found nationally, but the percentage of those who achieve five good grades including English and mathematics is higher than the national average and has continued to rise over the last three years. The school can feel rightly proud of this achievement, which has been largely achieved through raising the attainment of boys. A rising proportion of students are not achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to G. A number of lower attaining students are following course routes

that do not lead to GCSE equivalent qualifications. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress when supported in school. Standards on entry to the sixth form are average. By the end of Year 12, students have made satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students enjoy coming to school and would recommend it to their friends. This is also reflected in improving attendance and increasing parental support. Students appreciate the extra-curricular provision of sports clubs, and the opportunity for older students to be sports coaches for younger students. Relationships across the school are good. There are very few incidents of bullying or racism, because incidents of all types are dealt with effectively. One pupil said, 'Even if there is a slight issue it is resolved straight away.' Students learn how to keep themselves safe.

The school's focus on improving teaching and learning has led to students enjoying learning more. There is some variation across the school. Most students develop the skills they need for their future lives, but a minority do not. Behaviour is good. Low-level disruption in a few lessons concerns students as it interferes with their learning. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. The school works at all levels to develop confident, open minded and responsible citizens and is continuing to embed this work further. Attendance is satisfactory. Students are able to make healthy choices about food, but a quarter of students have admitted to smoking at some point.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

New strategies, a more rigorous system of lesson observation, and closer collaboration between subject departments, have rapidly increased the proportion of good teaching. Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength, and this is imparted with great enthusiasm so that students enjoy learning. Because all lessons are planned with clear objectives, students understand the purpose of their work. The most successful lessons are well organised and move along at a brisk pace, often through a series of short activities which involve and stimulate students. Students are kept on their toes by skilful questioning to check and deepen their understanding. Teachers use praise well to encourage and motivate students. Many teachers are particularly confident and skilful in using technology to engage students' interest and enthusiasm, and move students forward with their learning. For example, in a Year 9 French lesson the teacher used the interactive whiteboard very competently and imaginatively to stimulate students' thinking, and develop the use of relevant vocabulary and phrases.

In contrast, some lessons are over directed by teachers and do not encourage students to develop independent thinking skills. Although many teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to students' learning in lessons, in some cases they are not effectively deployed. Marking of students' work is variable. Much is of high quality but too often, there is a lack of precision in what students need to do to improve their work. A small but significant minority of students do not have their needs identified in lesson planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been developed flexibly with the aim of matching the needs and interests of all students. Students follow an appropriate range of subjects in Years 7 to 9. A special support group has been established for a small group of students in Year 7 to help them make a successful transition to secondary school. The options in Years 10 and 11 enable students to take a mixture of vocational and academic courses. Links with the nearby college allow students to follow courses related to work. An alternative curriculum for students who become disinterested or are identified as being at risk of underachieving provides opportunities to undertake basic accreditation in conjunction with work based learning. About 40 Year 10 and 11 students undertake the sports leadership programme, giving them opportunities to work with primary school students. Students appreciate the range of courses available as it allows most of them to take options suitable for their abilities and interests. However, an increasing number of students are following courses that do not lead to GCSE equivalent qualifications.

Resources for information and communication technology (ICT) are good and are used well to promote learning in other subjects. The modern languages department has been instrumental in taking a lead in developing teachers' use of ICT across the school, although uptake in languages at Key Stage 4 is low. Extra-curricular clubs, predominantly in sports and the performing arts, and activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, contribute significantly to students' personal development and enjoyment of school. The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal and academic development, but needs further improvement. Students take part in educational and residential visits and these enrich the curriculum and help to raise aspirations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school meets all safeguarding requirements. Considerable effort is made to help students attend school. Staff are committed to encouraging the enjoyment and achievement of all learners, and are having an increasing impact in securing this. Students are confident in seeking help when necessary, and are supported well by committed staff who give their time generously.

Students receive regular feedback on their progress, although the quality of teacher feedback varies between subjects. The school has good systems to collect information about students' progress and is beginning to use this information to adjust provision. Strengths include support for literacy and numeracy, and personalised learning pathways for some students. The advice students receive during transfer and transition is good and, as a result, students settle quickly on entry to the school, and respond well to expectations within the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has an ambitious vision for the school. He has an objective view of current provision and achievement, informed through a sustained programme of talking to students at every level and a rigorous internal programme of evaluation. Since his appointment, he has focused closely on aspects of provision that have hitherto limited school effectiveness. Through introducing new staffing responsibilities, some key appointments, and by setting clear

expectations, more effective management is being established at all levels. The headteacher has established an effective senior management team, which is working closely with him to secure further improvements. There is still some inconsistency in the quality of middle managers.

Staff work coherently together with a common agenda to raise teaching standards, provide good support for learning, and offer greater challenge for students to succeed. Managers regularly and accurately monitor the quality of teaching. This improved management is now leading to higher standards, as shown in the most recent examination results at Key Stage 4 and corresponding improvement in the sixth form. It has also nurtured the good personal development of students, positive attitudes to study, and a satisfactory understanding of the communities of which they are part. There is more to do in monitoring to ensure students are aware of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country. Governors make an important contribution. They know the school well through commitment of their time to working in school, a good understanding of data, and through close and regular scrutiny of policies and progress reports. Their work has both supported and challenged the school and maintained the drive for improvement as governors continually identify new goals for further school success.

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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?	3	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?	3	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

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	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
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?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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**

17 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Weston Road High School, Stafford ST18 0YG

You will know that we recently came to visit Weston Road and we thought you would like to know what we have said about your school. Thank you very much to those of you who took time to speak to us to tell us your views, or show us round the school when we got lost.

We think that your school is rapidly improving and satisfactory overall. We have seen how the results in your examinations at GCSE and in the sixth form are rising and are now in line with results in most schools. The proportion of you getting higher grades including English and mathematics is high and this is impressive. Your headteacher and other senior leaders are strongly focused on making sure you all do as well as possible in your examinations.

We thought the great majority of you behave well in school and the older ones in particular are maturing into responsible young people. You are looked after well by staff in school who ensure you are given good guidance about your next steps. There are a wide range of courses and extra-curricular opportunities open to you and we know you appreciate them. Those of you in the sixth form are particularly fortunate to enjoy such an extensive range of choices because of the partnerships the school has set up with other providers.

There are a few things we have asked the school to do.

- Improve teaching by making sure you are given more opportunities in lessons to work independently and that work is always appropriate for those of you working at different levels.
- Make sure more of you get qualifications that are equivalent to five GCSEs
- Make sure that the leadership of all subject departments matches that of the best.

We hope you will do your bit to help the school improve further. May I take this opportunity to wish you every success in your future.

Yours sincerely

Mark Sims Her Majesty's Inspector