

Wolverley CofE Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135061
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	329021
Inspection dates	23–24 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Ian Hodgkinson

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	938
Sixth form	117
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Withers
Headteacher	Richard North
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Blakeshall Lane Wolverly Kidderminster DY11 5XQ
Telephone number	01562859800
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a school of average size, with a relatively small sixth form. It opened in September 2007 as a result of a local reorganisation of schools, which saw the closure of middle schools in the area and the incorporation of their pupils into newly formed primary and secondary schools. Wolverley operates on the site of a former high school. Students travel to the school from a wide geographical area. Most are White British. A small number of students, from Eastern Europe and India, are at the early stages of learning English. A lower proportion of students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school faced many challenges when it started a year ago, including unfinished building work and temporary classrooms to accommodate the new year groups. A high proportion of newly qualified teachers formed part of the new staff at that time. From September 2008, the school has had a new headteacher, a new chair of governors, and has restructured the senior leadership team and some middle management roles. The school has a specialist designation in music.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school's effectiveness is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress to attain broadly average standards. The school's first GCSE results in 2008 can, at this stage, only be compared with unvalidated national data or the previous year's national results. They suggest that, while the proportion of students gaining five GCSEs at the higher grades A* to C is below average, the proportion passing GCSEs at grades G and above is above average. That nearly all students leave school with a worthwhile qualification is a mark of the success of a good curriculum, which is increasingly well tailored to meet the individual needs and interests of the students, both in the main school and the sixth form. The school's effective participation in a partnership between local schools and colleges has significantly broadened the range and level of courses available to students aged 14 to 19, either on the school's site or off site at partner institutions. The curriculum also offers a wide range of enrichment activities which are much enjoyed by the students. A good range of well supported sporting activities makes a good contribution to students' development of healthy lifestyles.

While students' personal development and well-being is satisfactory overall, it does have some weaknesses which inhibit their academic progress. In particular, many students lack self-confidence and belief in their own abilities, and can be highly reliant on their teachers to guide them through their learning. This lack of independence in learning too often slows progress in lessons, restricts the enjoyment students gain from finding things out for themselves, and reduces their capacity to evaluate their work and make decisions. Teaching is satisfactory overall, and is most successful where teachers use methods that encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and to reflect on the quality of the work they are producing. Most teachers implement the school's behaviour policy effectively. However, in a small minority of lessons the teacher's expectations for students' behaviour are too low and there is inconsistent application of sanctions and rewards. Where this occurs, poor behaviour by students, most often in the form of low-level chatter or horseplay, disrupts learning.

Students nonetheless say they feel safe in the school, and that the school deals very effectively with bullying. Students are well cared for and supported. Those with learning difficulties and those learning English as an additional language make good progress in the development of their basic skills as a result of good support programmes which are well designed to meet their needs. The academic guidance students receive is satisfactory overall, but they are not sufficiently well aware in all subjects of how they are performing and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new headteacher and chair of governors give the school clear direction. Sound school self-evaluation has led to an appropriate focus on improving the climate for learning in classrooms and to help students 'learn to learn'. Monitoring of the quality of the school's provision has not been sharp enough in making links between how well students learn and the quality of teaching. Nonetheless, the school's successes in implementing its music specialism, the significant raising of attainment for potentially underachieving students in Year 11 through the mentoring programme, and the resolute approach of the school's leadership in the implementation of its behaviour for learning policy, all point to the school's satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form's effectiveness is satisfactory. Students' personal development is satisfactory overall, and has good features. Many students show a positive sense of responsibility towards the main school community and lead younger students well in enrichment activities. Relationships between students and with staff are good. Attainment on entry to advanced courses is below what is typical nationally. Attainment at A level was below average in 2008 and targets were not reached for the higher grades. Although teaching and learning are satisfactory and ensure that current students make satisfactory progress, not all students gain the skills and confidence to work independently. Nevertheless, the very large majority of students complete the courses they begin. Most achieve satisfactorily, and often well on intermediate courses. The curriculum provides an extensive range of choice at all levels through a helpful partnership with other institutions. Students appreciate the support and guidance that they receive in choosing their courses and career pathways, but not all are fully aware of their academic targets and what they need to do to reach these. Leaders and managers have recently carefully evaluated sixth form performance and have adapted the education provided to meet students' needs more effectively. Managers have rightly recognised that students should be suitably qualified to undertake advanced courses and are raising entry requirements accordingly.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more opportunities for students to work collaboratively and encourage them to develop skills as independent learners.
- Eliminate low-level disruption by consistent implementation of agreed strategies for managing behaviour.
- Involve learners in their own assessment so that they gain a clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve their work and reach their individual targets.
- Evaluate more regularly the quality of teaching, and judge its effectiveness in terms of its impact on the learning and progress of students.

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

Students' achievement is satisfactory. They join the school with standards that are broadly average and finish Year 11 with broadly average standards, albeit with fewer reaching the higher grades in GCSE than is the case nationally. The school's first set of GCSE results in 2008 were broadly in line with targets linked to expected rates of progress for students nationally. Pass rates at GCSE and completion rates for vocational courses are relatively high, as are retention rates on courses in the sixth form, which reflects well on the school's broadening curriculum. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those with English as an additional language, make good progress, especially in their acquisition of literacy skills, as a result of support which is carefully matched to their needs. Results in the specialist subject were higher than in most subjects and showed that good progress had been made.

Students' achievement in the sixth form is also satisfactory. Standards at A level are below average but students join the sixth form advanced courses with lower GCSE scores than are typical nationally.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students have mixed opinions of their enjoyment of school but they do enjoy the relationships that they form with their peers and the opportunities to participate in a variety of enrichment activities, including those in music and sport. While most students behave sensibly and show consideration to others, there is a small minority whose behaviour is a distraction. Other students complain that this acts as a barrier to their learning. Students, however, say that they feel very safe in the school. The quality of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, although their capacity for spiritual reflection and awareness of cultures other than their own is underdeveloped. Students' understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle is good. They are enthusiastic about sport and its benefits and appreciate the opportunities the school offers. Students like to undertake responsibility in school and would like to have wider opportunities for this. They are active in participating in the local community, particularly through events promoted by the school's specialist music status. They have less awareness of the cultural and faith diversity in the wider UK community. The development of workplace skills is satisfactory. Skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT) are broadly average, but students do not have enough opportunity to develop the skills of teamwork, discussion or independent learning. They do, however, have plenty of opportunities to find out about working life through an increasingly broad work-related curriculum.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the majority of lessons, teaching engages students through a range of methods and resources that are well conceived and matched to the students' needs and interests so that they make at least satisfactory progress. Some teachers make effective use of the interactive whiteboard and, in the most successful lessons, teachers use questioning skilfully to challenge students and to check their understanding. The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are understood and these students are well supported by their teachers and teaching assistants so that they make good progress.

In a very small minority of lessons, planning of what is to be learned is not sharp enough; students are insufficiently challenged and make limited progress. The pace is slow and lessons are dominated by the teacher. This gives insufficient opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and to think and work things out for themselves. This results in a passive response from the students and, too often, leads to instances of off-task behaviour that inhibit learning. At times, there is inconsistency in teachers' application of the school's agreed strategies for behaviour management and, where this happens, it results in low-level disruption to lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has developed flexible pathways in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form to suit students' needs and aspirations through strong partnership arrangements with local schools and colleges. The school newly offers a diploma in construction through the consortium arrangement and there are firm plans in place to introduce further diplomas next year. Specialist status as a music college has led the school to strengthen and enhance the music provision for its students who enjoy and benefit from increased scope to broaden and develop their composition and performing skills. The successful 'Pyramid' concert is an example of the school at its finest, where a cast of 300 performers attracted an audience of 1,000 from the local community. In addition, both pupils and teachers from local primary schools benefit from the school's specialist status. The school provides an impressive and extensive enrichment programme that is well attended and enjoyed by the students who speak especially warmly of the school band, the dance club, Young Enterprise and of the diverse range of sporting opportunities. In Key Stage 3, the Opening Minds curriculum is designed to impact positively on the students' independent learning and communication skills, but the school still awaits its full impact on students' personal development or on the standards they achieve at the end of each key stage. Throughout the curriculum, there are insufficient opportunities to secure and extend students' spiritual and cultural awareness and understanding.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Students are well cared for, and the support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those learning English as an additional language is particularly good. Arrangements to safeguard students' welfare meet requirements and are robust. Sound systems are in place to identify individual students who are underachieving or who have personal and social difficulties in order to address these problems at an early stage. The mentoring programme for Year 11 students has been particularly effective. The school has strong links with a wide range of external agencies to meet students' needs flexibly. It has also worked effectively with the families of students with poor attendance records to get those students to attend more regularly. The induction arrangements to prepare students for their arrival from primary schools and 'settle them in' are widely praised by parents. The quality of academic guidance to students, however, varies considerably. Many students are uncertain about how well they are doing in many of their subjects and about what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Under the leadership of the headteacher and chair of governors, new systems and strategies have already been introduced to give direction, raise expectations and improve accountability. The new development plan, for example, rightly focuses the school's attention on improving the 'climate for learning' in classes and developing students' independent learning skills. Specialist music provision has been well managed; together with the school's very active participation in the local 14 to 19 consortium arrangements, it has served to promote community cohesion effectively at a local level. The school recognises, however, that students do not have a broad enough awareness of life in the wider UK community. School self-evaluation has been

sound, but the monitoring information on which this is based varies in quality. In particular, there has been a large variation in the frequency and quality of the monitoring of teaching and learning across subjects. Data to show how students' progress varies between subjects, classes and year groups have not been presented in a form that is easy enough to interpret, to allow managers to intervene quickly. However, a new system for tracking such progress is imminent. Governance is satisfactory. Governors have given the school good support through a period of rapid and sometimes difficult transformation, but they recognise that they have not previously done as much as they could to forge close links with subjects and curriculum teams.

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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	NA	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

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	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?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
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	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	3	

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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
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	3	
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**

25 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Wolverley C of E Secondary School, Wolverley, DY11 5XQ

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to my colleagues and me when we visited the school for its recent inspection. We much appreciated your contributions to our discussions and the opportunity to see you at work and play.

Your school provides you with a satisfactory quality of education. You make sound progress to reach standards that are broadly average by the time you reach the end of Year 11. Although the school is very new, it offers, in partnership with other schools and colleges locally, a good curriculum which gives you many opportunities from Year 10 onwards to choose courses that interest you and suit your abilities. Students whom we spoke to made it clear to us that they also enjoyed the broad range of enrichment opportunities available, such as in sport and music. Your active participation in many of these activities helps you to develop healthy lifestyles. You feel safe in a school that cares for its students well.

Our report points out some key ways in which the school can improve further. Firstly, we judge that you need more opportunities to think and learn independently to develop your confidence in your own abilities. Secondly, you made it clear to us how frustrated you felt when, in a small minority of lessons, your learning was disrupted by the poor behaviour of a few students. This tends to happen where teachers do not use the school behaviour policy fully, and so our report asks for more consistency from staff in this area. You can clearly help in this regard by behaving well and supporting the learning of others. Thirdly, your learning would benefit if you had a clearer understanding from assessments about how well you were doing and what you need to improve. Finally, we have asked the leaders and managers of the school, who already have a clear idea about how to take the school forward, to make sure that, as part of that process, regular checks are made on how well you are learning in lessons.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson Lead inspector