

Wheeler Lane Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103501
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336096
Inspection dates	27–28 April 2010
Reporting inspector	Nada Trikić HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	609
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Pearson
Headteacher	Mr Richard Tattersfield (Acting Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2007
School address	Wheeler Lane Kings Heath Birmingham
Telephone number	0121 444 2864
Fax number	0121 444 0540
Email address	enquiry@wheelerslane.bham.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 34 lessons and 34 teachers, and held meetings with school leaders, staff, representatives of the governing body and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at documentation including improvement plans, analysis of students' progress, records of classroom observation and training plans, attendance and exclusion data, quality assurance records, governing body minutes, and questionnaires from 170 parents and carers, 114 students and 68 members of staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- attainment in English and mathematics and the effectiveness of improvement plans
- whether new initiatives in the curriculum were sufficiently embedded to meet the needs of all groups of learners
- the impact of the technology specialism, particularly design and technology
- the school's response to promoting community cohesion linked to its context
- the school's evaluation of the impact of partnership.

Information about the school

Wheelers Lane is a smaller than average secondary school serving an area with a wide variety of social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Just over half of the school population is from minority ethnic backgrounds. Pakistani and Indian students form the largest sub-groups with many other minority ethnic groups represented. The number of students who speak English as an additional language is above average, with very few at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above the national average. The number of students identified by the school with special educational needs and/or disabilities is high. Most of these students have a moderate learning difficulty or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The college gained specialist status for technology in 2000. Key Stage 4 provision is extended through links with a local school and further education college.

The school holds a number of national awards including Investors in People, Sports Mark, Healthy Schools and Inclusive Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Wheelers Lane is a good school with outstanding partnerships that extend provision and ensure access to specialist services to promote well-being. A strong team spirit, high expectations and driving ambition has led to a notable improvement since the previous inspection. This is evident in the high quality learning environment, highly respectful and harmonious relationships, improved attendance, and the shared focus on learning. Staff have created an exceptionally safe and secure learning environment in which the boys thrive. Leaders have been successful in raising aspirations and instilling a strong sense of purpose and belonging. Strengths in the curriculum, an emphasis on improving the quality of teaching, and high quality care, guidance and support have been instrumental in raising overall standards and accelerating progress. These improvements demonstrate the school's good capacity to further improve.

In 2009, the proportion of boys gaining five or more high grade passes was significantly above average. Indian and Pakistani students did particularly well, with standards above school and national averages. Improvement reflects exceptional success in the expanded vocational curriculum that meets boys' needs and interests well. The boys welcome the opportunity to choose subjects from Year 9 and this motivates them to gain a wide range of qualifications. From low starting points a very large majority of boys make good progress. Boys identified with moderate learning difficulty or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties have personalised learning plans that set out specific targets. Close involvement of parents, careful tracking of progress and support from the achievement team leads to good progress, and builds confidence and self-esteem.

The proportion of boys gaining five or more high grades including English and mathematics is now close to the national average although standards remain low in these key subjects. Leaders recognise that this is the remaining challenge to further promote boys' economic well-being. Staffing is now stable and subject leaders in English and mathematics are working effectively to raise standards, with an emphasis on regular assessment and quality feedback. Boys respond positively to this approach: confidence is growing and they are motivated to achieve the best grade possible. Assessment is used effectively to identify individuals and groups who fall behind. Intervention through well attended Easter classes, the involvement of parents, revision through information and communication technology and personalised support motivates the boys to succeed. Staff understand the need to balance academic support with encouragement to build self-belief. Increased curricular links with primary schools and revisions to the Key Stage 3 curriculum are supporting a longer term strategy to raise standards.

The quality of students' learning experiences can vary across lessons. Boys become

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thoroughly engrossed in tasks that stimulate their interest, such as in media where excellent support and dialogue ensure learning is reinforced and celebrated. Strong relationships, good behaviour and positive attitudes make a strong contribution to progress in lessons. The use of assessment and marking is an effective feature of provision. Leaders have good personalised plans for teachers to secure good learning and progress, although the impact of this approach is not yet delivering consistency. Leaders are committed to the promotion of equal opportunity and take positive action to tackle barriers to success, such as low aspirations, through visits and events to broaden horizons. However, equality priorities are not explicitly included in improvement plans to maximise contributions from the whole community, to track progress routinely, to inform subsequent actions or to celebrate success. The boys have a good awareness of multicultural, Human Rights, local and world issues and are able discuss their views openly and maturely. Vertical tutor group arrangements promote cohesion extremely well. This is highly valued by the boys and promotes responsibility and peer support. The governing body has good insight and use this well to offer support and challenge. For example, one governor is linking closely with the design and technology department to support a stronger profile for the specialist subject. The governing body is representative of the diversity within the school and contributes energy, commitment, skills and expertise enthusiastically.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure effective implementation of the strategy to raise standards in English and mathematics through:
 - action plans that set out precise objectives with clear measures to enable progress to be checked
 - regular monitoring and analysis of progress for cohorts and groups set against national standards.
- Achieve greater consistency in the quality of learning and progress by increasing the proportion of securely good and outstanding teaching.
- Ensure that identified priorities for promoting equality of opportunity and tackling barriers to learning and personal development are explicit in improvement plans so that:
 - all members of the school community can contribute to agreed actions and progress can be reviewed and reported
 - achievements are celebrated, and priorities refined.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Evidence from the boys' work observed during the inspection indicates that most make good progress. In most lessons boys display a strong desire to learn, and make good use of the support and guidance of their teachers, linked to grade descriptors, to improve the quality of their work. Strong relationships support collaborative learning

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which the boys enjoy. Self and peer assessment is used very effectively in the best lessons and helps the boys to identify where they need to focus attention. The needs of boys with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well known and teaching assistants display sensitivity in the support they provide in the classroom. One Year 11 boy commented positively on how the school had helped him to learn English so that he could achieve well. The boys are confident in their use of information and communication technology and value access to high quality facilities. Where learning is less effective, tasks do not take account of different needs and interests, and quality targets are not set to ensure that the boys are challenged to do their best.

Other key features of student outcomes include the following.

The boys have an excellent understanding of safety and say they feel safe and have no fear of bullying. This view is endorsed by 98% of parents and carers who completed the questionnaire. There is a high degree of trust and the boys are confident that they can share any concerns and worries.

The boys have a good understanding of healthy eating and an awareness of the health aspects of smoking, drugs and alcohol. The boys are keen on sport and there is good take-up of an increasing range of extra curricular sport activities, some organised by members of the Sports Council, such as dodge-ball and table tennis.

The boys are very polite, welcoming and friendly. Exemplary behaviour was observed in the playground, around corridors and in assembly. Where lessons are less interesting, a few boys tend to show poorer concentration and application. Boys respond well to school rules and conventions which they see as fair.

The boys are proud of their school. They are keen to be involved in a wide range of responsibilities in school and increasingly within the local community, which is enhancing their awareness of being a good citizen. Involvement in a project with the local police has helped to develop their social awareness and contribution to reducing crime in the community.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

High expectations and challenge characterise the strongest teaching, supported by a good range of strategies to engage the boys and to encourage a shared focus on learning. The use of assessment for lesson planning and delivery is good and enables progress to be carefully monitored. Questioning is used well to gauge boys' understanding. This is particularly effective when teachers probe initial responses to draw out explanations and challenge boys to think more deeply about their learning. Teachers' marking of books is generally good because comments are helpful in showing how to improve, with appropriate targets. All boys asked knew the level they were working at and what they were working towards. In satisfactory lessons teachers do not ensure that learning is reinforced. In these, there are too few opportunities to discuss and share learning, and assessment is used less effectively to check understanding.

High quality of care, guidance and support is seen in the personal support provided for all boys, and targeted input where barriers are identified. This is reflected in a reduction in the number of persistent absentees and exclusions. Staff give generously of their time, which is hugely valued. Excellent links with primary schools ensure that Year 7 boys settle quickly and get off to a good start. The consistent promotion of positive behaviour and especially high standards of dress set the tone for the school.

The curriculum includes a number of innovative features, such as topic days and mixed age groups to provide variety and to enrich the boys' experiences. The boys choose from an increasing range of vocational courses in school or through local providers to meet their aspirations. The impact of the specialism can be seen in the excellent provision for information and communication technology which supports skills and confidence. The specialist subject of design and technology is identified as an area for development, as is the coordination and quality assurance of the personal, social and health education programme to strengthen consistency. Extra curricular provision is strong and enriching, and contributes well to the boys' enjoyment of school life.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	2

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The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Governors, leaders and staff have a strong passion and drive for promoting improvement, founded on a shared belief that every boy will enjoy their school experience and gain qualifications to support their future. Highly effective procedures ensure that safety is at the core of the school's work. This was consistently evident in inspection findings and the views of the boys, parents and carers. Leaders have an accurate view of strengths and weaknesses through quality assurance activities to check on all aspects of the school's work, underpinned by an open and self-critical approach. Faculty reviews are a very helpful strategy for examining provision in depth and to identify strengths to share. Effective systems for setting targets and monitoring progress have supported an upward trend in overall standards. Recent improvements provide a more interactive approach to enable greater efficiency in monitoring the progress of different groups of learners.

Improvement plans support a focus on priority areas, although they are not supported sufficiently by clear measures and monitoring arrangements to enable progress to be rigorously checked and reported. Leaders have invested successfully in a training package to support teaching quality in partnership with local schools. Lesson observations are used effectively to target personalised professional development, with regular training to support consistency and the sharing of good practice.

Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion and equal opportunity. This is evident in the respectful and harmonious relationships throughout the school and the low number of bullying and racist incidents. Leaders take positive steps to identify and meet the needs of vulnerable and underperforming groups. However, governors recognise that this work is not explicit in planning to support a wider contribution to the priorities identified. Effective steps have been taken to analyse the local context to identify where developments are needed to promote community cohesion. This is especially strong within the school where diversity and difference are embraced. Cohesion issues linked to crime in the local area have been discussed with the police, with positive outcomes resulting in improved relationships and a greater appreciation of local issues. A recent link with a Malawi school in a deprived area supports boys' understanding of contrasting lifestyles through e-mail communications. The school recognises that single sex status requires specific strategies to support community cohesion. The curriculum is used to raise the profile of women, including reference to the suffragette movement; assemblies are used to focus on famous women and visitors from the local community help to present positive role models.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The school has the overwhelming support of parents and carers. They recognise the significant improvement made in recent years and appreciate the highly individualised care and support provided. Inspectors fully endorse this view. The school has responded well to the requests from parents, carers and students to increase the number of extra curricular activities. The proportion of boys involved in extra curricular sport is increasing well to support healthy lifestyles.

Responses from parents and carers to the questionnaire indicate that a very small minority disagree that the school prepares their sons' well for the future. Inspection findings confirm a successful focus on reducing the number of boys who do not take up education, employment or training when they leave the school. The promotion of personal skills for working life are strong. However, leaders recognise that further improvement in English and mathematics will extend the boys' future opportunities.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Wheelers Lane Technology College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 170 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 609 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	74	44	88	52	6	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	80	47	86	51	3	2	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	109	64	56	33	3	2	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	84	49	75	44	9	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	88	52	73	43	5	3	3	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	82	48	76	45	5	3	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55	32	98	58	13	8	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	65	38	81	48	4	2	18	11
The school meets my child's particular needs	76	45	77	45	12	7	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	74	44	85	50	4	2	5	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	59	35	89	52	9	5	8	5
The school is led and managed effectively	82	48	78	46	5	3	4	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	102	60	61	36	2	1	3	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 April 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Wheelers Lane Technology College, Birmingham, B13 0SF

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited recently. We were very impressed with your behaviour in lessons and around the school, your attitudes to learning and your strong commitment to achieve. We enjoyed observing you at work and listening to your views. Teachers know you very well and you told us there is always someone to turn to if you need help or advice. You also told us how much you appreciate the support and care of staff and the time they give to help you succeed. We judged this as outstanding. Since the last inspection there have been notable improvements and everyone agrees that Wheelers Lane is a good school with outstanding partnerships to extend what it can offer. Staff have worked relentlessly to make improvements to ensure a safe learning environment where harmonious relationships and respect support learning and achievement. New courses and improvements in teaching have helped to raise overall standards and improve your progress. You too, have played your part in the school's improvement through the responsibility you take, and your willingness to get involved.

Leaders know that there is more to do to continue the good rate of progress within the school. Standards in English and mathematics are not yet high enough. The leaders of these subjects have good plans to support this and are already working really well together to ensure that you have good opportunities to develop your skills and confidence. We could see that you really enjoy lessons where you had interesting and challenging tasks to complete with opportunities to discuss and share your ideas. This approach supports your learning and progress very well. Not all lessons help you to learn at a fast enough rate and we have asked leaders to continue to increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons. Wheelers Lane has a strong commitment to equal opportunity and community cohesion. It does a lot to help tackle barriers to your learning and personal development. We have asked leaders to ensure that identified priorities are included in the school's improvement plan so that everyone can make a contribution, and progress can be reported and celebrated.

We are sure that you will want to make a contribution to these and other areas by working closely with staff to make your school even more special. You deserve to feel

very proud of your contributions so far. We send you our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Nada Trikic

Her Majesty's Inspector

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