

Shire Oak School (A Science College)

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104260
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	336272
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Raymond Jardine

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1398
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	196
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rick Gamble
Headteacher	Gary Crowther
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2006
School address	Lichfield Road Walsall WS9 9PA
Telephone number	01543 452518
Fax number	01543 373204
Email address	st-crowther@shire-oak.walsall.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	19–20 May 2010
Inspection number	336272

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

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

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2010

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 40 lessons taught by 39 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, the chair of governors and chair of finance and resources committee on the governing body, and school staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation, including the school development plan, arrangements for safeguarding students, school policies, minutes of meetings and examination results. Inspectors analysed completed inspection questionnaires from 648 parents and carers as well as questionnaires from students and staff.

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

- ? students' achievement, particularly in English, to determine whether teaching and use of assessment are sufficiently consistent to raise attainment
- ? the quality of provision and students' progress in the sixth form to determine the extent to which they have improved since the last inspection
- ? the influence of partnerships on the breadth and quality of the curriculum.

Information about the school

Shire Oak School has been a science college since 2003. It is larger than average and includes a sixth form. The very large majority of students are White British and the remainder come from a range of other ethnic groups. A few are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. There are a few looked after students. A below average proportion of students has special educational needs and/or disabilities and an average proportion has a statement of special educational needs. The school has gained national Healthy School award, International School status and is a Fair Trade School.

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

This is a good school that has improved significantly since its last inspection. The outstanding quality of care, guidance and support for students has been maintained. Significant improvements have been made to curricular provision that have contributed to students' above average and rising attainment, good progress and their outstanding contributions to their school and wider community. The school's track record clearly demonstrates its good capacity for further improvement.

Students much enjoy school life. Lessons are stimulating and students and their parents appreciate the good teaching that students receive. Relationships are very good. The purposeful atmosphere for learning and good behaviour that is typical in lessons promote effective learning. Well-targeted professional development for staff is contributing to greater consistency in key aspects of teaching. For example, all teachers now routinely share expected learning outcomes for the lesson, often at three levels to reflect the range of abilities in the class. In the best practice, teachers skilfully involve students in reviewing their own progress to these objectives and ensure all are appropriately challenged. Such excellent practice can be found across the school but it is not yet consistent and on occasions the more able in the class are not challenged enough. Similarly, the quality of feedback that students receive through marking is not yet consistent with the best. The school is rigorous in its self-evaluation, accurately identifying where provision can be improved further in these and other ways. Good systems for tracking students' progress to academic targets include regular assessments of their work ethic. Experienced year heads and directors of learning (subject leaders) use these to help identify students who might underachieve, which contributes significantly to the school's drive to raise standards further.

Students are very proud of their school. The diverse ethnic and social groups make an excellent contribution to a very harmonious school community. Students readily take the many opportunities for leadership roles and there is a high take up of the wide range of additional clubs, sports and community activities that are a feature of the outstanding curriculum. Excellent partnerships with other schools, colleges and employers enable the school to provide a wide range of routes to qualifications which meet the full range of students' needs and aspirations very effectively. Almost all students go on to further education, training or employment after Year 11. Safeguarding arrangements are excellent. Students say that they feel very safe at school and almost all parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire also agree.

Many of the features of the main school apply to the sixth form which is also improving. Sixth form students make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community and their academic achievement is rising as a result of determined and

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

effective new leadership. Students much appreciate the new facilities, broad curriculum and high standards of care provided. But achievement is not yet good, partly because it varies too much between subjects. Systems for monitoring students to their targets are much improved but assessment is not yet used consistently across all subjects to guide students and ensure that none falls behind. In addition, the school is seeking to raise the ambition and drive of some students in relation to their next steps beyond the sixth form, which is now showing some signs of success.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- ? Raise teaching quality so that much is outstanding by: ?
 - ensuring that teachers consistently plan tasks and activities to match the range of learning outcomes for their students so that all are challenged ?
 - providing marking and feedback on students' next steps with the same clarity and regularity as the best practice in the school
 - ? encouraging students to work more independently in reviewing their work and using feedback from teachers to take their next steps in learning.
- ? Raise standards further in the sixth form and reduce the variation in achievement between subjects by: ?
 - ensuring that student targets and assessments are used to good effect to guide their next steps in lessons and when working independently ?
- raising the aspirations of individual students in relation to higher education opportunities and the standards they can achieve to meet them.

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

Attainment in Year 11 is above average and has been rising since the last inspection. There are strong signs of further rises this year. Well-targeted actions have led to significant improvements, for example in English and among middle ability students. A real strength is the school's specialist science provision where standards are high and which has improved very considerably year on year. In relation to students' slightly below average attainment on entry, their learning and progress are good across all abilities. In the lessons seen, it is evident that the wide range of very well matched courses offered at Key Stage 4 and beyond contributes much to students' enjoyment and determination to succeed. This is one factor contributing to the gap closing between boys and girls and the progress of some lower attaining students in past years. Students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities progress as well as their peers and in some cases better; they are well supported in lessons, particularly those who have a statement of special educational needs. Almost all students enjoy their learning. In most lessons students make good progress and in some classes it is excellent. Students enjoy working independently and collaboratively with partners, showing good skills in sustaining their concentration. Behaviour is consistently good and in some classes it is excellent. Students' written work is presented well and they are productive,

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

reflecting their generally good work ethic. They acquire good basic skills and use information and communication technology (ICT) very well to aid their learning.

Specialist status in science has contributed much to pupils' experiences and instilled a lasting enjoyment in the subject. Many older students work as ambassadors to their partner primary schools, coaching younger pupils in science and mathematics and more recently, in literacy skills. Students are very polite and courteous to visitors and show consideration for others. They raise considerable charitable funds and show initiative in many other ways; for example, as buddies to other students, and through the influential school council. Students' outstanding involvement in the community is firmly rooted in the school's ethos and values. The Shire Oak Award, which many students undertake, recognises their achievement in leadership skills and community involvement. Most students understand healthy lifestyles, reflected in the very considerable involvement in sporting activities and their positive choices at mealtimes. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They reflect on the beliefs of others through the school's Learning and Life Skills programme and they take seriously their commitments as a 'Fair Trade' school. Well-established connections abroad, for example with a school in Ghana, help develop students' appreciation of other cultures and traditions. Attendance is about average and is rising.

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	2
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
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3

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

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

The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching in the large majority of lessons observed during the inspection was good or better and none was inadequate. A key feature that is typical of most lessons is the good use of lesson objectives which helps students to become more involved with their learning. Teachers plan a variety of activities that engage students' interest and active learning. Lessons are sequenced well so that key concepts and ideas develop clearly, often with very effective use of computers and projectors to help add clarity to class discussions. Questioning is a strength because teachers encourage students to explain their reasoning and to argue their case. Teachers have a wealth of information about students' standards and their targets to guide their planning. The best lessons reflect some very effective use of these assessments to match specific students to appropriately challenging learning outcomes and activities. This focus on clear learning outcomes for each student has been a priority for the staff's professional development but is not yet fully embedded in the skills of all teachers. The science specialism is contributing much to developing teaching expertise and the use of assessment across the school. Most students know their targets and receive good guidance on what is needed to achieve them. Day-to-day feedback to guide next steps tends to be stronger orally in lessons than through written marking.

An impressive feature of the outstanding curriculum is its flexibility to meet the full range of students' needs and aspirations. The science specialist status is a very strong component of provision which influences many partner institutions as well as benefiting all students within the school. Students have a very broad range of guided choices for Key Stage 4 options and all get the choices that they request. There is an impressive array of vocational courses and workplace programmes made possible through the extensive partnerships that the school has developed. Very good provision is made for gifted and talented students. The acquisition of key skills, particularly in ICT, is well embedded into the school's work. Large numbers of students enjoy the extensive additional activities and memorable experiences provided. Provision for students' health, social, emotional and life skills development is very effective in promoting some outstanding outcomes, particularly in helping students to stay safe and actively contribute to their community. Standards of care, guidance and support continue to be high. Inspectors were impressed by the highly effective support and guidance provided for specific looked after students who have significant emotional difficulties. Transition arrangements from primary schools are excellent and the school works very well with outside expertise to assess and plan for those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff and parents have full confidence in the school's leadership. Staff are proud of their school and have a sense of common purpose in what it is trying to achieve. Much of this is due to the clear direction provided by the headteacher and the school's senior leadership team. But middle leadership too plays a central part in driving up the school's performance. Teaching is monitored by senior and middle leaders with a strong focus on students' learning. Challenging targets are set for the school, for subjects and for individual students and the school rigorously compares its performance with national benchmarks to ensure its priorities are directed into the right areas. Improvements to standards in English over the past year illustrate the success of the school's efforts. Racist and bullying incidents are rare but these are carefully recorded and acted on to help ensure that all students are treated with respect and encouraged to give their best. Gaps in the progress of different groups such as boys and girls have been closing, demonstrating the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.

Arrangements for safeguarding students are excellent. Child protection procedures are of a high standard. Students too are encouraged to help promote high standards of safeguarding, for example, through their representation on the school health and safety committee. The governing body is much involved in shaping the school's development and holding it to account. It forms an integral component of school review procedures, including monitoring the implementation of key policies such as safeguarding arrangements. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It is at the heart of the local community; its provision has been audited and developmental work is ongoing to extend an international dimension to students' learning, particularly relating to celebrating cultural diversity.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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	
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

Sixth form

Attainment is broadly average overall and is rising. However, there are some variations across subjects that reflect some uneven achievement among students. While some students achieve well, achievement is not yet consistent enough to be good overall. The new sixth form centre provides much improved facilities to support and encourage students' independent study. Students report that they much enjoy sixth form life, the wide range of academic and vocational courses and additional activities provided. The breadth of the curriculum is impressive as the sixth form has grown. The appointment of a new head of sixth form in 2009 has injected new vigour into school strategies for accelerating improvement in academic achievement. Teaching is improving and much of it is now good. A key improvement is the rigour with which students are monitored to their targets and their progress reviewed by the head of sixth form. Pastoral guidance and support is also highly valued and effective. Students report that they much appreciate the commitment being shown in this respect. The quality of assessment and academic guidance for students across subjects is still too variable as the leadership is aware and working to address. The clear signs of improvement demonstrate that the capacity to sustain these improvements towards the goal of higher standards is good.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers that responded to the inspection questionnaire is pleased with the school's work, particularly the good quality of teaching and the effectiveness of its leadership and management. Almost all feel that the school does a good job in keeping their children safe. A few feel that their suggestions and concerns are not acted on sufficiently, for example when dealing with bullying incidents. Inspectors found that the school has good systems for involving and informing parents promptly, including the use of text messaging. Actions taken are extensively logged and followed up to check their impact.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Shire Oak 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 648 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,398 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	189	23	401	62	37	6	14	2
The school keeps my child safe	277	43	355	55	9	1	5	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	197	30	405	63	35	5	5	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	230	35	377	58	28	4	3	0
The teaching is good at this school	217	33	399	62	17	3	3	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	164	25	401	62	55	8	8	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	138	21	431	67	51	2	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)	208	32	393	61	19	3	5	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	206	32	396	61	29	4	8	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	227	35	343	61	56	9	8	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	147	23	398	61	56	9	8	1
The school is led and managed effectively	229	35	383	59	12	2	4	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	276	43	340	52	20	3	3	0

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.



21 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Shire Oak School, Walsall, WS9 9PA

Thank you for the warm welcome that we received when inspectors visited your school recently. I am now writing to tell you about our findings.

Yours is a good and improving school of which you are rightly proud. You attain standards that are significantly above average and rising. You make good progress in your learning and we were impressed by your good behaviour and strong work ethic in lessons. You make a very strong contribution to the school and wider community in many ways, for example through taking leadership roles, as ambassadors to linked primary schools, helping the elderly locally and raising charitable funds. This is a real strength reflecting the breadth of experiences provided by the excellent curriculum. The wide range of tailored options in Key Stage 4 and beyond also enables virtually all of you to go on to further education, training or employment. The staff and governors are rigorous in their attention to ensuring your safety and well-being and we noted from your comments that you feel very safe at school. The respect and courtesy that you show visitors and your relationships contribute much to a harmonious school community.

Inspectors found that the teaching is mainly good and some is outstanding. The school rigorously analyses your progress and examination results, as well as checking on teaching quality. Lessons are interesting and well planned; most set a range of objectives and outcomes to ensure that students of different abilities are challenged. But we recognise that there is still more work to do in this respect to help make more of the teaching outstanding. We have asked that you receive feedback from marking that is as good as the school's best. You can help your teachers by regularly checking how well you are progressing and acting on the guidance that you receive for your next steps in learning. We have also asked the school to raise sixth form standards further by ensuring that assessment and guidance are used consistently with students across subjects. We also want the school to continue its efforts to ensure that ambitions to go on to higher education are set high among all students.

Yours sincerely

Ray Jardine

Lead inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 08456 404045, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.