

Oldbury Wells School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123583
Local Authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	340375
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	899
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue White
Headteacher	Sarah Godden
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2007
School address	Oldbury Wells Bridgnorth Shropshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 44 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school improvement plan, minutes from governors' meetings and other relevant documents and policies. They also analysed the responses from 162 parental questionnaires and both staff and student questionnaires.

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

- the progress made by students and how leadership has improved the quality of provision in mathematics and English
- the effectiveness of pastoral support to ensure good behaviour
- how the school utilises its specialist areas
- how information and communication technology (ICT) is developed across the curriculum.

Information about the school

Oldbury Wells is a specialist science school that occupies listed buildings which are located on two sites, on opposite sides of a road. The majority of students travel to school from outlying towns and villages by bus. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is low, as is the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Fewer students than average are eligible for free school meals. The school received an Ofsted survey inspection for information and communication technology (ICT) in November 2008. The school was awarded Secondary Geography Quality Mark by the Geographical Association in 2008.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school provides a secure and welcoming atmosphere for students, and delivers a satisfactory standard of education. Standards are average, with results in GCSE examinations for the foundation subjects being better, but results in both English and mathematics fell to below average in 2009. Through its effective self-evaluation procedures, the school has rightly identified this as an area in need of improvement and has formulated an appropriate plan to rectify problems. Senior leaders give a strong and clear steer on how to improve but this ambition is not always translated into action by middle managers. There are some highly effective subject leaders and in these departments, teaching and learning are good, resulting in good achievement. However, there are also departments where practice is very variable and weaknesses and inconsistencies have not been eradicated. Issues which were identified within the recent ICT inspection have been improved and ICT is now more integrated across the curriculum. Similar integration of literacy and numeracy are in the early days of development. The school has shown through its actions to overcome issues that it has a clear potential to get better. However, because many of these are in the early days of implementation, and have not become embedded, it is judged to have a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Progress in lessons is best when the teaching, which is judged satisfactory, is lively and engaging. Behaviour around the school is good but behaviour overall is judged satisfactory because in a number of lessons students remain passive and not active learners. In these lessons students are not sufficiently enthused or motivated. There is often too much teacher input and students have few opportunities to work independently or in groups. In the best lessons, assessment is used well to match the work to the correct level for students, although at other times work is not well matched to the variety of abilities within a group or is not sufficiently demanding. In some subjects, assessments are used very effectively to identify and advise students on what they need to do to improve and challenge them to meet or better their targets. However, this is inconsistent and in some classes assessment fails to identify errors or inform students how to improve.

Good use is made of the science specialist status to provide additional resources and opportunities, for example the artist in residence who was observed linking science and art, and also to support local primary schools. Students have a good understanding about issues within their local community but do not have a good overview of life within a multicultural Britain. The school works well with parents and as a partner in the local consortium to ensure it can offer a wide variety of subjects in its good curriculum.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in English and mathematics by:
 - ensuring teaching enables students to engage actively in their learning
 - building upon the good practice within these subject areas by sharing effective and engaging teaching ideas and activities so that all staff deliver interesting and challenging lessons.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that learning is more consistently good or better by ensuring:
 - work is well matched to the needs of students, particularly the more able
 - students get down to work quickly and have more opportunities to work independently or in groups
 - assessments, both through marking and teacher feedback, consistently identify and inform students how to improve.
- Improve the impact of middle managers so they:
 - monitor and improve the quality of provision within their subject areas
 - share ideas and support colleagues through appropriate training.
- Increase students' awareness of different ethnic groups within multicultural Britain.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students start at school with standards which are broadly average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are above average for a number of key indicators but results in both English and mathematics which have been average over the last few years, fell in 2009 to below average. This also meant that the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, also fell to just below average.

Over time, students make satisfactory progress. Observations from lessons during the inspection show that progress is variable. In the best lessons, students make good progress because they are actively engaged in their learning and enjoy their work. However, when lessons are less engaging and enjoyable, progress is slower and very occasionally progress is poor. When progress is slower, students' behaviour is often compliant. Behaviour around the school and in the corridors is orderly and good, with students showing due consideration to each other and to staff. Behaviour is judged satisfactory overall because students are not consistently actively engaged in their work. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good because robust systems are in place to support learners; within lessons and through a range of additional support workshops. Teaching assistants are well qualified and

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experienced and effectively support students' learning.

Most students say that they feel safe in school, and this is supported by the results from both the parent and student questionnaires. Students' understanding of safety is good as demonstrated when using chemicals in science lessons. They are confident that there are adults in school who they can turn to should they need help. Students have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy life. Many are active in their participation in sport at break times and after school or take advantage of the breakfast club or healthy meal options at lunch time. Moral development is good, with students making a constructive contribution to the life of the school through their involvement in school productions and charity fund-raising. Students are supportive of initiatives in the wider community but these opportunities are currently few in number.

Students' strong social development means they acquire good interpersonal skills. They attend well and whilst relative standards in English and mathematics are low this does not adversely affect their ability to function well in the key skills. These, along with a good understanding of the next steps they need to take, means they are well prepared for life after school. Cultural and spiritual awareness develop well through the many artistic and sporting opportunities in the school, as well as opportunities to visit museums or other countries. However, there are fewer opportunities to develop understanding about other cultural groups within Britain.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

2

How effective is the provision?

Students are able to follow a wide variety of courses in Key Stage 4. These include appropriate vocational courses including hairdressing, construction and mechanics at local providers. A group of students was observed discussing the health and safety issues in a very effective lesson and they demonstrated how the curriculum supported their good understanding of staying safe as well as preparing them well for their future employment. Students say they feel well supported in making their choices. There are a wide variety of sporting and performing arts extra-curricular activities which many students enjoy, including those who manage to overcome transport problems to attend. The strong pastoral support ensures students are well supported across a variety of areas. Tutors monitor the progress of students towards their targets and in Year 10 they deliver an accredited course in preparation for work. Pastoral support also ensures that behaviour around the school is good. However, in a significant proportion of lessons teaching does not adequately engage and enthuse students. In these lessons, because there is too much teacher dominated activity, students are compliant and are not able to get on with their work quickly enough. Also they have few opportunities to work in groups or independently. When the curriculum is used well for students to participate in practical work or investigations, lessons are lively and engaging and students' enjoyment increases. There is also a careful match between the level of work set and the different abilities of students so that the ablest are challenged appropriately and the least able are well supported. However, in other lessons work is not well matched to the range of students' needs.

The school has recently reviewed its assessment and marking policy. It gives clear guidance to staff on the requirements that should be met across the school. The inspection found that the practice varies both within and between departments. In some areas, students are clear about their target grades. They know how well they are doing and receive regular, effective, and detailed guidance on what they need to do to reach their targets. Elsewhere, the guidance is inconsistently applied and this leads to some students not knowing how to make progress towards their target. Year 7 students say they were well prepared for school prior to arriving and supported well when they start school in September.

Support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. These students are often taught in small groups and they follow appropriate courses so that all attain qualifications to support their next stage of education. The school also has robust systems to support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and need additional support and help.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leaders give a strong steer and direction. This is exemplified by all staff who completed the questionnaire saying they know what the school is trying to achieve. Senior leaders have formulated a coherent school improvement plan to overcome the issues they had identified concerning weaknesses in English and mathematics and in the quality of teaching. Middle managers have implemented school policies with variable success. In the best examples, there is a clear departmental response to the issues and consistent practice across the department. However, in other areas the changes have not been fully implemented so that areas of weak performance and inconsistent practice still exist.

Governors are very supportive of the school and have appropriate structures in place, although they are not always rigorous enough in their evaluations of the impact of the policies. For example, they have been very rigorous in ensuring safeguarding procedures have been fully implemented: consequently, these are good. However, the promotion of community cohesion is only satisfactory because despite a clear policy, it has not had the intended impact and students are not aware of the importance of considering the contribution of different ethnic groups within a multi-cultural Britain. Nevertheless, students have a good understanding of their local community and there are also a variety of links with overseas areas, for example, with a school in Louisiana.

The comprehensive analysis of examination data and identification of underperforming groups have supported the school in ensuring good equality of opportunity. This analysis has also included the proportions of students taking part in extra-curricular physical exercise and girls' participation rates in timetabled physical education (PE) lessons. These have both been improved by including a wider choice of activities and changing the uniform requirements for girls when taking part in PE. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate	
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The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is broadly average and results show that students make satisfactory progress. Improvements to results in 2009, particularly in physics, art and design (graphics) and sociology show that students are now making better progress in lessons. This is also evidenced by an improving quality of teaching. The school works well with the neighbouring high school to offer a wide variety of A level courses, including vocational courses.

Retention rates, along with attendance and punctuality, are high. This is because of very good relationships between students and staff. Students say staff are very supportive and can always be relied upon to provide very good personal assistance although they commented that at times the initial guidance for all students could be more helpful. Students make a satisfactory contribution to the life of the school by supporting younger students with their reading.

Leaders and managers have a clear overview of how to improve the sixth form and rightly identify that the quality of teaching and rate of progress need to be raised further in some subjects.

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	3

Views of parents and carers

Responses from parents were generally positive, with the vast majority saying that their child enjoyed school. Although some parents judged that the school did not support their child's learning, many said how good pastoral support is. A parent commented, 'My

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child has been very well supported recently through a difficult time at school, staff have been understanding and helpful giving them extra support.' This was supported by a number of other similar comments and the team's observations. Poor behaviour in a few classes and children not being interested in lessons were also raised by parents, one saying 'some lessons are very uninspiring, she seems to do a lot of copying from books/board.' The inspection team found behaviour to be generally satisfactory with many good elements around the school, although they were aware from students, but did not observe, rare incidents of poor behaviour. They also found some lessons to be less inspiring, with students not being fully engaged in their learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Oldbury Wells School 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 162 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 899 students registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	55	34	91	56	13	8	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	51	31	104	64	6	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	42	26	103	64	10	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	31	94	58	8	5	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	45	28	104	64	8	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	19	106	65	20	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	21	107	66	14	9	0	0
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)	46	28	96	59	5	3	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	30	89	55	14	9	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	49	30	87	54	16	10	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	33	20	96	59	11	7	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	55	34	95	59	6	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66	41	83	51	9	6	0	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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



27 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Oldbury Wells School, Bridgnorth, WV16 5JD

When I visited your school recently with my colleagues, we met some of you at lunchtime, and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were impressed with your friendliness and helpfulness and how well you behaved around the school. We agree with those of you who told us that you feel safe in school and we were pleased at how high your attendance is. As one of you said in your questionnaires, expressing similar views to others, 'I really like my school, it is the best school yet. Every morning when I wake up I like to go to school', although some of you commented that the school could do more to improve behaviour in some classes. We have judged that your school delivers an acceptable standard of education.

Results in some of your GCSE subjects are good but standards in both English and mathematics are not high enough and we have asked your school to improve these. We observed you in a number of good lessons but overall we judge teaching as satisfactory because often you do not get engaged in your work quickly enough. You really enjoy lessons which involve you with areas like investigations, practical work and group work. You also respond well when assessments inform you how to improve. As you told us in your questionnaire, not all lessons are like this and we agree with you from those observed. We have asked your school to improve the teaching so more lessons are like the best.

Staff care for you well, and make sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education, including staying in school for A levels, going to university or to work. You said that you thought you were helped to settle into school at the start of Year 7. You enjoy the social side of school as one of you said 'school is a nice place to be because there are loads of friendly faces.' But you do not have a good understanding of what it is like growing up in other areas of Britain which are more ethnically diverse than where you live. We have asked the school to help you gain a better perspective. Your headteacher, and assistant headteachers have a clear understanding of what needs to be done and they are very determined that these improvements will be made. They are supported by some good middle leaders but this is not consistent so that in some areas improvements are not happening fast enough. Again, this is an area we have asked the

school to improve.

I wish you well in this school, which many of you told us is very supportive, and ask you to do all you can to help and support your teachers.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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