

Wednesfield High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104392
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	286928
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Rob Huddleday 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1097
6th form	159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Hayburn
Headteacher	Peter Coates
Date of previous school inspection	10 March 2003
School address	Lichfield Road Wednesfield Wolverhampton WV11 3ES
Telephone number	01902 558222
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school became a specialist college for engineering in 2004. It operates on a split site and draws pupils from several areas with significant levels of disadvantage. Just over a quarter of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly Indian or Caribbean. Around 10% speak English as an additional language but there are only a few at the early stages. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average, as is attainment on entry to the school in Year 7. However, the proportion of higher-attaining pupils has been consistently lower than the national figure.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to achievement and teaching.

Despite doing some things effectively, the school does not provide adequately for its pupils. This inconsistency is clear in the examination results over the last few years. The pupils do extremely well in design and technology, for example, but have performed poorly in several other subjects. Given their starting points in Year 7, they should have done much better during their time in the school. Only the most able pupils have tended to get near their true potential. Examination results have begun to rise but achievement and standards are inadequate because too many pupils are still underachieving in lessons, particularly at Key Stage 4. The quality of teaching and learning in science and in the work of several teachers across a number of other subjects is poor. Teaching and learning overall are therefore inadequate, even though there are shining examples of good or outstanding work in most departments.

The school has shown that it has the capacity to improve. Leadership and management are satisfactory and have brought about some significant improvements, for example, in attendance, behaviour and aspects of the curriculum. The headteacher and the senior leadership team have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have identified suitable priorities. Improvement has been made harder by difficulties in recruiting and retaining science teachers. However, weaknesses have also persisted because the headteacher has not ensured that leaders and managers give sufficient emphasis to checking whether policies are being carried out. Not all departments have taken enough initiative, sometimes failing to implement straightforward recommendations made by senior managers. This has led to erratic standards of teaching and learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

The pupils' personal development is satisfactory and the school's pastoral system works effectively. The pupils are safe and many respond positively to opportunities to contribute to the broader life of the school, for instance, through the school council. Many pupils say they really enjoy their work but others admit they could work harder if more was asked of them. Academic guidance based on teachers carefully assessing their pupils' abilities and talents is strong in some subjects but weak in others. The school's reporting system is well organised and potentially valuable but is not understood by all pupils and its accuracy and impact are unproven.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision is satisfactory. Numbers have grown in recent years, reflecting the students' confidence in the education provided. Attainment by the end of Year 13 has improved since the last inspection but remains below average. Given their below-average starting points at the beginning of Year 12, this means that most students make satisfactory progress. There is a reliable system in place for checking students' progress and students speak highly of the range of support provided by their teachers and learning mentors. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the most effective lessons, teachers ensure that content is both relevant and meaningful and

provide well-planned opportunities for students to work collaboratively. The curriculum is satisfactory and has been expanded recently to include a wider range of subjects leading to A level. Students have more choice as a result of a consortium with two local secondary schools and Wolverhampton University. Nonetheless, a significant number of students are not achieving their potential because of the limited range of vocational programmes in Year 12. Students' personal development and well-being are good. Opportunities to contribute to the wider school community have improved and the role of the head of sixth form has been enhanced. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as is the capacity to improve, but procedures for recording and promoting attendance remain unsatisfactory. The sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement, particularly at Key Stage 4, by ensuring that teaching is consistently effective and makes good use of assessment information.
- Strengthen the provision for science.
- Monitor the implementation of policies more rigorously and ensure that all levels of management are more accountable for improving the pupils' progress.
- Broaden access to vocational programmes in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

At Key Stage 3, standards are below average. Although the combined proportion of pupils attaining the expected Level 5 in English, mathematics and science has improved over the last three years, the gap between the school's average point score and the national figure has not narrowed. Nevertheless, there was a sharp rise in science from the exceptionally low results of 2005, and there are encouraging signs of improvement in English. Standards at Key Stage 4 are also below average but have improved from the exceptionally low results of recent years. In 2006, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades rose significantly to 47% but the figure including English and maths was only 28%. Pass rates at grade C or higher in different subjects varied widely. They were particularly high in vocational science and resistant materials but unacceptably low in expressive arts and media studies. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to G grades remained well adrift of the national figure. Standards in the current Year 11 are higher but still below average.

The school accepts that many pupils have made less academic progress than would be expected in their time at the school. While more-able pupils and pupils of Indian and Caribbean descent have performed satisfactorily, a significant minority of less able boys and girls, including many with learning difficulties, have underachieved substantially. One of the main yardsticks used to measure achievement from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 was exceptionally low in 2004 and 2005 and there was only a slight upturn in 2006. The inspection team's observations of lessons, scrutinies of the pupils' work and analyses of assessment data confirm the school's view that achievement is continuing to improve. However, the pupils' progress still varies too widely between, and sometimes within, different subjects and is therefore inadequate.

Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3, where there are clear procedures for identifying needs and supporting improvement. At Key Stage 4, the school's

data indicates that underachievement among these pupils is reducing but has not been eradicated.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are satisfactory. Additional support from learning mentors and increased attention to close monitoring of absence have led to a significant improvement in attendance, which is now just below the national figure. The pupils' behaviour is satisfactory and they are generally courteous and polite. However, a small amount of disruptive behaviour was seen during the inspection. The school has introduced an effective house system with an emphasis on rewards. This, together with the introduction of an internal exclusion room, has contributed to a decline in the number of exclusions.

The development of the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. Personal, social and health education and active citizenship lessons make a good contribution to their broader education. A good range of visits and trips at home and abroad, and work in a variety of subjects, especially art, enrich cultural awareness.

Most pupils feel safe at school and are comfortable about approaching staff if they have any concerns. They are confident that any bullying incidents will be dealt with quickly and effectively. The school encourages healthy lifestyles through work within the curriculum, the promotion of sports and changes to the lunchtime menus. However, only a minority of pupils use the school's dining rooms. There are good opportunities for pupils to make an active contribution to life in school and the wider community. The school council represents pupils' opinions well and many of its suggestions are acted upon. Recently, pupils have been consulted about the development of the innovative toilets, changes to school uniform and lunchtime menus. Pupils act as peer mediators and help younger pupils by listening to them read. The pupils raise significant amounts of money for a variety of charities. They are effectively prepared for future employment and study through work experience, and by good links with the careers service and places of higher education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils do not make satisfactory progress overall because teaching and learning are inadequate. Although pupils clearly enjoy their work and learn well in many areas, there are subjects where expectations are low, books are left unmarked and lessons are not sufficiently well planned. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning but are let down in a significant minority of lessons by unstimulating, poorly structured activities. The quality of teaching and learning in science is especially weak.

The quality of lesson planning varies widely across the school and is often superficial. In Years 10 and 11, pupils express frustration at the lack of challenge in many subjects, with homework seen as somewhere just to finish off classwork. Pupils would like to copy less from the board and to understand their targets better in all subjects. In Years 7 to 9, lessons are generally

better organised and tasks more challenging but, again, homework is not used effectively and often involves only completing classwork. In some subjects homework is rarely or never set. Even in one of the school's stronger subjects, art, for example, sketchbooks are not seen as a place to develop skills and talents outside of the classroom. The role and quality of assessment are inconsistent across different departments; in good lessons, for instance, in English, modern foreign languages, design and technology and physical education, precise evaluation of the pupils' work is seen as a powerful tool for raising achievement. In weaker lessons, the pupils receive little or no feedback about areas for development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and, in the main, meets the pupils' needs. It is reviewed regularly and is increasingly well evaluated. The school has recently decided to change the way Year 7 is taught because of the findings from a successful pilot designed to ease the transition from primary schools. There is an increasing range of vocational courses in the option blocks in Years 10 and 11, providing different assessment and learning styles more suited to many of the pupils. Resources for information and communication technology (ICT) are extensive and put to good use. Staff and pupils are positive about the school's specialist status and value the outstanding provision in design and technology and the improved resources and enhanced opportunities for work-related learning. A small group of pupils participates in the young apprentice scheme for engineering. Timetabling is problematic because the school operates on two sites and also has to take into account the needs of its two consortium partners. The school has not found an effective way of dealing with these issues. Punctuality to lessons is unsatisfactory and considerable time is lost at the beginning of lessons because there is no allowance for the time it takes to travel between its sites.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support the school provides for pupils are satisfactory, with some good features, particularly in the provision of care. The mixed-age tutor groups are effective and younger pupils value the opportunity to be with older family members. Vulnerable pupils receive good support through extensive working links with a range of external agencies that ensure pupils' well-being. The house system enables staff to know their pupils well and for pupils of different ages to work and socialise together. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are secure.

Pupils receive effective careers guidance. A very high proportion of parents and pupils attended the recent Year 9 options evening. Pupils with learning difficulties receive specific targeted advice for future academic and work pathways. Staying on rates post-16 are high. Older pupils support younger pupils during tutorial time with advice on options and work experience. Each tutor group also has a trained pupil counsellor providing good support to the other pupils.

Academic guidance is inconsistent but developing. Examples of good practice exist in a small number of departments but other departments have been slow to develop robust procedures for assessment. The accuracy of the school's new tracking procedures is untested and many pupils are unsure of their targets because these are not discussed regularly with form tutors

and other staff. In design and technology, effective academic guidance is a key reason why pupils make outstanding progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has continued to articulate an ambitious vision for the school and in some areas of its life the school has lived up to these high expectations. There have been significant improvements in attendance, behaviour, the provision for learning difficulties, recruitment into the sixth form, standards at Key Stage 3 and in the headline figures at GCSE. In addition, the school has maintained its pronounced strengths in technology and boosted its profile and budget by gaining specialist status. In a number of other areas, leadership and management have not had sufficient impact despite their generally accurate evaluations of the school's performance. In particular, the senior leadership team has not secured a suitable level of consistency in the quality of teaching despite having a clear picture of what needs to be tackled. The school improvement plan correctly identifies the right priorities but is not underpinned by effective procedures to check whether actions are carried out. It was agreed, for example, that all lessons should have a clear structure but this has not happened. The senior management team does not always expect enough of departments and teachers and has assumed that policies are being implemented when they are not. Too much has depended on the motivation and understanding of individual managers.

Governors are well organised and their committees function effectively. There are good examples of the governors holding the school to account, for instance, over finance, the introduction of reports and the provision of vocational courses. The governing body now realises that it has not given enough attention to data about the school's performance.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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 the learners' needs?	4	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
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?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils and Students

Wednesfield High School, Lichfield Road, Wednesfield, Wolverhampton WV11 3ES

Thank you for welcoming us to your school during its recent inspection. I am particularly grateful to those of you who met formally with members of the inspection team. We take your comments very seriously. This is a short summary of our full report.

- Strengths:
- Most of you in the top sets and upper band do well.
- Design and technology is particularly strong in the school.
- There are examples of good teaching and learning in nearly all departments.
- Important aspects of the school, such as behaviour, attendance and some exam results, have improved since the last inspection.
- The headteacher and senior staff know what is needed to make sure the school continues improving.
- The house system and mixed-age tutor groups work well in helping to make the school a safe and friendly place which most of you enjoy attending.
- The sixth form now functions more effectively and standards have improved.
- Weaknesses:
- Some exam results have been poor and too many of you are not achieving what you are capable of, especially in Key Stage 4 and in science.
- Some lessons are poor because they are badly organised and uninspiring.
- The school has not checked carefully enough to make sure that the quality of education it offers is consistent across the school.
- The way the school assesses, tracks and reports on your progress is too variable and many of you are unsure of your targets and how well you are doing.
- Some of you in Year 12 struggle with the level of academic work in the courses you choose.

We have told the school to remedy these weaknesses quickly. An inspector will return in six months to make sure that this is happening. There will be another full inspection next year.

There is much to be proud of in your school and the headteacher is keen to make it even better. You can play your part by setting your sights as high as possible and not being satisfied with less than your best.

I wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday Her Majesty's Inspector