



The Mary Webb School and Science College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123577
Local Authority Shropshire
Inspection number 292720
Inspection dates 2–3 November 2006
Reporting inspector Ian Stuart

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive | School address | Pontesbury |
| School category | Community | | Shrewsbury |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 | | SY5 0TG |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01743 790333 |
| Number on roll (school) | 604 | Fax number | 01743 790890 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Y Holyoak |
| | | Headteacher | J Brown |
| Date of previous school inspection | 28 January 2002 | | |

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|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Age group | Inspection dates | Inspection number |
| 11–16 | 2–3 November 2006 | 292720 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Mary Webb School and Science College is smaller than most comprehensive schools. It became a science college in 2003. It is also part of a government sponsored partnership of secondary schools and colleges in the Shrewsbury area. Students come from a range of circumstances reflecting the mixed and rural nature of the area. Very few come from minority ethnic groups or do not speak English as their first language. However the number in both categories has increased in recent years. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is slightly below average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Mary Webb School and Science College is providing a satisfactory education for its students. It is a very pleasant place to be in with very well behaved students, good and improving facilities and very good relationships between students and staff. These factors give considerable potential for the school to excel, particularly with the benefits of specialist science college status and the partnership arrangements in the Shrewsbury area. However at present students' achievement is satisfactory. They enter the school with average standards and they leave with average standards.

There are inconsistencies across the school and not all teachers capitalise sufficiently on the capacity of many students to reach higher levels. Alongside much good and some outstanding teaching, some is uninspiring and mundane. Some subjects analyse very well students' achievements both individually and across classes so that they can track progress to know what has gone well and how to tackle what has not gone so well. Other subjects do not yet use performance information in this helpful way and students do less well as a result. Some teachers and subjects have high expectations of what students can achieve by setting high standards and challenging targets. However, this good practice is not sufficiently shared throughout the school, nor is teaching monitored systematically enough in some areas.

The headteacher and governors recognise in their self-evaluation that the school has not kept pace with improvements nationally. However, through new staff appointments and a restructuring of posts of responsibility, the school's leaders are now better equipped in terms of people and organisation to tackle the causes of inconsistencies. It is too early for these changes to show themselves in results but the signs are encouraging. There is a good sense of purpose within the much strengthened senior team with complementary skills. There are also many strengths at faculty level though this is more varied, and the role of year learning mentors as lynchpins in the drive to raise standards is not well developed.

Students' personal development and well-being are good and this is a considerable strength of the school. Students' welfare is well looked after though academic guidance is much less strong. Most parents are very pleased with the school and the relatively few concerns mentioned to the inspection team have been brought to the attention of the headteacher. The benefits of specialist status are being increasingly felt in the curriculum and in additional opportunities across the school. After a period of relatively slow progress, the school is now better placed to move forward soundly and with confidence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of students' achievements through more effective use of information on students' performance in all subjects and by rigorous checking of their progress across the school.
- Bring all teaching up to the quality of the best in the school by systematic monitoring and sharing good practice.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards by the end of Year 11 are average. This represents satisfactory achievement from students' average levels of attainment on entry. However students' relative achievement has declined in recent years when compared with similar students nationally. There are also marked variations within the overall picture. Results in some subjects, notably art and design, geography and science, have been consistently good. If students performed as well in all subjects as they do in these subjects, achievement would be good and, in some cases, outstanding. Provisional results for 2006 continue to show a very mixed picture though the whole-school expected targets were just about met. Encouragingly, boys narrowed the gap between themselves and girls. There are also fewer differences between the achievements of different groups of students, including those with learning difficulties. Improvements in the mathematics and English results in the tests taken at the end of Year 9 narrowed the gap with science.

The main reason for these variations is the inconsistent way subjects use information about students' performance to track their progress and inform their teaching practices. Where subjects are doing this well, standards and achievement are higher. Despite very good practice in some subjects, the school has lagged far behind many schools in a whole-school approach to using performance information. This is now changing with a strong impetus from a recently appointed senior manager who is successfully encouraging some subjects to recognise the value of intelligent use of data. There is much more still to be done. But there are signs that a much stronger and more effective approach is now beginning to pay dividends in better achievement in some subjects such as English where recent progress in the effective use of performance information is ahead of some other areas.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' good personal development and well-being are reflected in their very good behaviour, their enjoyment of school and their pride in their school. Their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They enjoy very good relationships with their teachers and support staff, and are keen to participate in and benefit from extra activities including school productions. However attendance is only satisfactory. Students have a strong sense of right and wrong which is fostered through class discussions, 'focus day' activities and assemblies. Because any anti-social behaviour is well managed, students feel safe and the occasional instances of bullying are effectively dealt with. Students are confident that there are adults they can go to with problems. They are enthusiastic, willing to help and keen to volunteer. However these qualities are not always harnessed fully because they are not currently given sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for organising events or making decisions. When students have been given an opportunity, such as the involvement of some of them in the bid for the 'Green Room', they have responded well and enjoyed the responsibility. Students work well in groups and contribute to their community by

becoming involved with local events and coaching primary school pupils in sports. National and international causes are well supported through fund raising and students have a sound awareness of global issues and cultures. Their spiritual development has improved since the last inspection through more opportunities for quiet reflection.

The school has successfully raised students' awareness of healthy lifestyles and as a result many now feel the lunches do not provide enough healthy options! The increased time for physical education and the many sporting activities are welcomed by students who participate willingly and in large numbers. They are also very positive about the good advice they receive about future career choices. Their commitment to work experience and their sound basic and computer skills also prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is much good and some outstanding teaching, but many satisfactory lessons do not get the best out of students who, for the most part, are very willing learners. The pace of some lessons is leisurely with insufficient challenge. Often this is because the work does not always fully match the range of different needs in the class and sometimes because teaching methods do not require students to think actively for themselves. In such lessons, assessment is not often used effectively to support learning with, for example, missed opportunities for students to assess their own work and that of others. However there is outstanding practice in the school which is not shared widely enough. First-rate teaching brings out the very best in students. For example in an art lesson students were inspired to achieve remarkable progress after comparing their artwork with excellent examples of similar work. They were taught to describe exactly what they needed to do to improve their own work. In better lessons a variety of activities sustains interest, often with opportunities to work together in pairs or groups so that they learn from each other. In the best lessons teachers know in detail the capabilities of their students, with activities challenging all to progress as well as they can.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum provides students with a traditional range of subjects and enables them to make sound progress. Students in Years 10 and 11 have options within a wide range of academic studies. The range of vocational subjects has improved in the school and through collaborative arrangements with local colleges and schools. But vocational courses are still relatively limited, restricting opportunities for some students for whom such courses are particularly suitable. The well planned 'focus days' contribute very well to the school's programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship. They enable students to investigate important issues in depth,

often helped by experts from outside the school. However they are not in themselves sufficient to cover all areas of PSHE and citizenship, leaving several gaps in the total provision.

The school's science specialism has given a good impetus to broaden the range of students' experiences within subjects through modern technology in particular. As yet, this has mainly benefited the curriculum in science, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT).

There is a good range of extra activities within and beyond the school day in sport, the arts and in the wider curriculum. These opportunities are much valued by the students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The care the school provides for its students is a considerable strength and helps to account for their good personal development. But there are weaknesses in the overall guidance and support students receive for their academic work.

This is a very caring school with great emphasis placed on the safety and well-being of students. The care for students starts through the very good partnerships with primary schools to ensure a smooth transfer to this school. These arrangements are much valued by students and parents. Risk assessments are carried out conscientiously. Child protection procedures are secure. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and disabilities are identified and well supported. The school and a range of outside agencies work well together and a visiting counsellor helps students with problems. Gifted and talented students have an exciting range of residential and day trips but their needs are not consistently addressed in normal lessons. Form tutors and year learning mentors do not yet play a sufficiently active role in checking and supporting students' overall academic progress. However some positive developments are beginning. A full range of performance information was available for the first time to tutors at a recent 'progress day'. This provided better opportunities than previously for a much sharper focus on achievement when tutors discussed students' progress with students and their parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and the headteacher has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Recent appointments and an important restructuring of responsibilities at senior and middle leadership levels have strengthened the school's potential to raise standards and achievement. Good systems to track students' progress and identify those who are underachieving are being put into place by senior leaders, but action

by other leaders is not yet consistent across the school's work. However the new team is demonstrating the necessary knowledge and expertise to tackle the school's priorities.

Senior leaders monitor the performance of others accurately and this enables areas for professional development to be identified and addressed. Performance management systems are sound with staff having targets related to students' achievement. Faculty and year leaders are generally effective in supporting the senior team but some weaknesses remain in the systematic monitoring of teaching. The school uses its funding well. Science college status has been soundly managed. It has been well managed in science and mathematics but the benefits across the whole school have not yet been fully realised. However, the co-directors now have more whole-school responsibilities enabling them to disseminate more effectively good practice across the entire school.

Governors support the school well. They gave their full backing to the headteacher in restructuring the senior team to give a sharper focus on raising students' achievement. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school though they acknowledge that they have not always challenged weaknesses with sufficient rigour. Following a period of limited progress, the school now has a sound capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

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|---|-----------------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|-----------------------|

Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

| | |
|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 |

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.

Leadership and management

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|--|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 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 | 3 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your very friendly welcome when we visited your school. Your views are very important. We enjoyed meeting you and we value very much the help you gave us.

There are many good things about you and your school. Nearly all of you behave very well and are keen to succeed. You get on very well with your teachers and support staff. You enjoy good facilities, which are getting better partly because of the benefits of being a science college. You are well cared for all the time, from the arrangements made before you start right through to advice about your choices when you leave. You have good opportunities to take part in extra activities such as sport, music, school productions and extensions of classroom work.

Although we are pleased about these things we think your achievement could be better. It is satisfactory at present, but, with all the advantages mentioned above, we think it could be higher. If you did as well in all subjects and in all lessons as you already do in some, then your achievement would be at least good and sometimes outstanding. The challenge for the school and for you is to bring everything up to the standard of the best.

To help the school and you to achieve well more consistently, there are several things that need doing, but we are asking the school to do two things in particular:

- Make better use across the school of information about how you are getting on, and checking your progress very carefully.
- Improve teaching, which is satisfactory overall at present, so that all of it matches the best that already exists.

We believe that these things are already beginning to happen. Your headteacher has been able to do some reorganisation recently and make some appointments which are having a good effect. We are confident that everyone in the school, including yourselves, will want to see these improvements take place and will want to be involved in helping to take the school further forward. I wish all of you good luck in the future.