

Washwood Heath Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103489
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	295325
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Ceri Morgan 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1278
6th form	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Anstey
Headteacher	Beverley Mabey
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002
School address	Burney Lane Stechford Birmingham B8 2AS
Telephone number	0121 7847272
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Washwood Heath Technology College is larger than average. It was re-designated as a Specialist Technology College in 2004. The student population is over two thirds boys and the majority of students come from minority ethnic groups, in particular from a Pakistani background. Although few are in the early stages of learning English, there is a high proportion whose home language is not English. The number of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is significantly above average as is those entitled to free school meals.

The college was given a Notice to Improve in March 2006. Prior to this, the responsibilities of the governing body had been undertaken by an Interim Executive Board (IEB) although this returns fully to normal governance in September 2007. The current headteacher took up her post in September 2005 following a period of five years with temporary leadership in the college.

At the time of the inspection Years 11 to 13 were on study leave and the timetable had been revised accordingly.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005 HMCI is of the opinion that the college no longer requires significant improvement.

Washwood Heath Technology College has continued the emphatic drive to improve begun by the headteacher and now provides a satisfactory education for its students. The rate of improvement is rapid. There is a sharp focus on improving the progress being made by students. This led to improvements in the 2006 results and early indications are that this will be enhanced further by the 2007 results.

Much of this improvement is due to the improved student tracking systems which are now used to set individual targets, both realistic and challenging. These are monitored each term and shared frequently with students. A strong senior leadership team has now been established and, under the very clear direction of the headteacher, has effected a change in the culture of the college. This ethos is well supported by a teaching staff who are committed to the students' well-being. As one student articulated, 'The best thing about this college is how the teachers look after you.' As a result, the personal development of the students is good.

Students who are identified as being at risk of not reaching their targets are now given good additional support, especially in Mathematics and Information and Communication Technology. Care, guidance and support are satisfactory rather than good, however, because there are inconsistencies in the guidance given to students with additional learning difficulties or disabilities.

The scale and pace of improvement is impressive although from a very low base. Standards in English improved significantly for students aged 14 in 2006 and a majority of students now make acceptable progress in lessons. The college also recognises that there is a considerable way to go to secure this improvement in all aspects of its work. Standards in some subjects, such as science, and for some groups of students remain too low and, although they are achieving satisfactorily, standards remain inadequate.

There is a variation in the quality of teaching meaning it is satisfactory overall despite some examples of good or better teaching. One of the main reasons why teaching remains satisfactory is because the work in lessons is not always matched closely enough to the ability of the students and there are too few opportunities for students to speak or write at length and take responsibility for their own learning. This means some lessons are not stimulating enough for the students to maintain interest. This limits the progress that they make. The college now has a wealth of student data available but does not always use it efficiently for strategic planning and, although some subjects, such as English, use it to build improvement plans very well, other subjects do not. This means some subjects are improving more rapidly than others and it is this variation in practice that means leadership and management are judged satisfactory rather than good.

The college acknowledges that it has not always fulfilled its responsibilities as a specialist college. However, this position has changed significantly over the last year. For example, partnership work with neighbouring schools is becoming more regular and funding is used more appropriately to improve standards. This far more rigorous approach to the use of funding has enabled the college to become one of the first to win a nationally recognised award for financial management.

The transformation in culture has been rapid and the college acknowledges that some of its recent initiatives, although successful, will take some time to improve standards for all. There are appropriate plans in place to monitor changes closely. The improvements required at the time of the last inspection have been secured. The curriculum, which was previously judged inadequate, now satisfactorily meets the needs of the students. The good improvement since the last inspection shows that the college has good capacity for continued improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

At the time of the inspection Years 12 and 13 were on examination study leave and there were limited opportunities to observe teaching. The sixth form provides a satisfactory education for its students, although numbers are low because too few students stay on. Achievement is satisfactory and the progress made by students in 2006 improved on previous years as a result of changes to the curriculum which made choices available that were more appropriate to the students' needs. The college plans to develop this further in the future to offer a wider range of courses as alternatives to A level. At present, some students still start courses that are not appropriate for them and, as a result, not enough students successfully go on to higher education. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory, as is teaching.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and progress across the college by more closely matching the work in lessons to individual student needs.
- Improve teaching and learning by encouraging greater input and involvement of students so they have the opportunity to exercise greater initiative.
- Enhance the use of college performance data, especially by middle managers, to make clearer key college strategic targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is now satisfactory, although standards remain low. The school is emerging rapidly from a period where the achievement and standards reached by students had been unacceptably low. In 2005, for example, the progress made by students in Key Stage 3 in English and mathematics was amongst the worst nationally. However, this position is being reversed and the progress being made is satisfactory given the students' starting points. This improvement is exemplified by higher attainment made in English by students in Year 9 in 2006 and the progress now being made by the majority in lessons, which is satisfactory. The progress being made by boys from a Pakistani background and more able students is improving as well.

Although standards are low in Key Stage 4, there is reason for optimism. The rise in standards already achieved by students in Year 11 in early examination results and predicted grades are a strong indicator that standards overall are rising. The college confidently expects around 46% of all students to achieve five A* to C GCSE grades in 2007. This would represent a second consecutive significant rise in standards. Further successes are the closing of the gap in progress being made by boys compared to girls in Year 9 tests and the better progress being made by students of Black African heritage. In 2007, the college is also likely to have no students leave with no qualifications at all for the first time since 2002.

Although this picture demonstrates improvement, low levels of literacy, especially writing, and teaching that too frequently fails to fully challenge students' potential, inhibit even greater progress being made across all subjects. The college has already started to tackle this problem.

Standards of attainment in the sixth form are broadly in line with national figures. Results at A and AS level improved in 2006.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of the students are good. Students enjoy being in college and show positive attitudes in lessons. Nevertheless, a few students report that they do not always find lessons interesting. Behaviour has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Students feel safe and know who to go to if they have a problem. Attendance levels have decreased over the past two years despite the best efforts of the college.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The great majority have respect and consideration for others and this has ensured good relationships in the wider college community. The college is notable for its racial harmony. Work in religious education and the interaction between students lead to an appreciation of the different cultures within British society. Racism or bullying does not affect most students and any incidents are dealt with quickly.

The student council and regular questionnaires enable students to influence what happens in college. Many students are involved in fund raising but there are few opportunities to be more directly involved in supporting people in the wider community. Students have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and the food choices available have improved. Careers advice and work experience provide a satisfactory insight into further education and work options but there are few business links and enterprise activities.

Students who continue to study after 16 are well supported. This includes occasional support for students even after they have left the college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teachers explain clearly what the main learning objectives are at the beginning of each lesson and often ask students to write these down so that they understand the context of their learning. Lessons are generally well structured. Teachers manage behaviour well and there is a calm learning atmosphere in most lessons. Homework is used well to support learning. Some subjects, such as English and PE, have a higher proportion of good teaching. The college has appropriate plans to use these expertises across all departments.

Despite these clear strengths there are some weaker areas. Too many lessons do not include specific activities for the full ability range, which limits the learning of both higher and lower attaining students. Some teachers adopt a 'telling' manner rather than letting students exercise initiative and independence. Some lessons fail to engage students' curiosity and commitment

and teachers can be tempted to talk for too long, thus limiting the opportunities for students' active involvement.

Teachers are increasingly skilful at using assessment data to guide students' learning. This means that most students know what level they are working at and what they have to do to reach the next level. Marking in most subjects is regular and points out what pupils should do to improve, although weaknesses in marking were seen in some mathematics books.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

There is a satisfactory curriculum which emphasises basic skills in Key Stage 3. Pupils who are less confident when they join Year 7 benefit from a curriculum that helps them to smooth their transition to secondary education and more able students can now take the Key Stage 3 national tests in English and mathematics a year early. This gives them the chance to study for an extra GCSE later.

The range and suitability of courses on offer at Key Stage 4 were judged unsatisfactory at the last inspection but are improving. Students now have a satisfactory choice of academic and vocational courses. There is a greater choice of courses for students in Years 10 and 11, including an alternative curriculum with a strong practical and workplace element. The college has enhanced the curriculum of some local primary schools by teaching French and Urdu by video links.

There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities. Many of these are designed to back up the college curriculum and help students reach their targets, but there are also other experiences, including judo and healthy cookery. The college offers a reasonable range of sporting activities, although it recognises the number of students who are able to attend these extra opportunities is low. The curriculum is also enriched by visiting experts, particularly in citizenship, and by visits to theatres and museums.

The curriculum has been revised in the sixth form and now offers a more appropriate range of courses. There are appropriate plans to further develop the range of courses available to students who wish to study beyond 16 but for whom A-level courses are not appropriate.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The college has all the necessary safeguarding procedures in place. Staff are diligent about authorizing absences and contacting homes to check on non-attendance. Good attendance is generously rewarded. There are good systems for managing difficult behaviour. Pastoral support is good, with an emphasis on positive encouragement wherever possible. Some students with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress by having extra help with English but this opportunity is not available to all.

Information from the new system for tracking academic progress is being well used in some subjects and year groups to encourage students to strive towards their target levels or grades and provide extra support to help them do this. This is not in place, however, in all subjects. Parents are kept well informed of the college's successes and their children's progress. They

are now much more involved in their children's education and have better information about how they can help at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher and newly appointed senior leadership team have a clear understanding of the strengths of the college, and are aware of areas for improvement. There is a shared determination and dedication throughout the staff to improve the quality of teaching and learning and to raise standards. Monitoring and evaluation systems have been improved in the last year. A new system for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning has been introduced, and significant improvements have been made in the use of data to identify underachievement and to set challenging targets for future improvement. Whilst there have been improvements in students' progress, there has been insufficient time for the full impact of these new developments to be realised. Middle managers have been given greater responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of their areas, but there is inconsistency in the way they undertake this role. Leadership in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Until recently, recruitment of staff has posed difficulties, but the college has worked hard to ensure that well qualified staff are appointed. Opportunities for the professional development of staff are well structured and linked closely to plans for college improvement. The programme of support and development for newly qualified teachers is very good. There is a good system for performance management for teaching and non-teaching staff which is linked to college improvement.

Governors are well informed and supportive of the college. They are effectively developing their role of challenging the college leadership team to improve standards.

The community aspects of the work of the college and its collaboration with other colleges and organisations have increased recently, although there is recognition that these are areas that require further development. The work of the headteacher that was recognised in the last inspection report has been maintained and there is an impressive level of energy evident in senior leadership that is driving the improvements being made.

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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?	3	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	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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	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	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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?	3	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	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.

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	2	
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	2	
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?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Washwood Heath Technology College, Birmingham, B8 2AS

As you know, your college was recently inspected and this letter is to let you know about the results of the inspection. If you want to read the complete report you can download it from www.ofsted.gov.uk. We would like to thank those of you we met and spoke to during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and we were impressed by the thoughtful way you talked about the college.

We were pleased to hear that you have a great deal of confidence in your headteacher and that you recognise how much the college has improved in the past couple of years. We are delighted that you enjoy being at college and that you said, 'College is like a big family – we're treated like adults as we get older.' Nevertheless the level of attendance has reduced in the past couple of years. The great majority of you behave well. You know about healthy lifestyles. You influence what happens in college through the college council and completing questionnaires. We heard that you get helpful advice on the next stages of education or leaving to go to work.

Most of you now make satisfactory progress during your time in Washwood Heath. Nevertheless, not enough of you yet reach the expected levels for your age at the end of Year 11 and more of you should consider staying on after 16. Teaching is improving, as is the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities. However, some of you suggested that you do not always find the lessons interesting enough.

We think your college is getting better all the time and can continue to improve. The main things that we are suggesting to college leaders are: to ensure that teachers provide work that is more closely matched to your abilities; and encourage you to use your initiative so that you become more involved in your learning. We have also asked that all heads of department become more involved in reviewing how well you are doing and how you are taught.

You, too, can play your part by helping the college to achieve these aims by ensuring you come to college regularly. Thank you for taking part in the inspection.

We would like to wish you well in the future.

Ceri Morgan Her Majesty's Inspector