

North Bromsgrove High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116928
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	312448
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	933
6th form	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Taylor
Headteacher	Sue Ballard
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2005
School address	School Drive Stratford Road Bromsgrove B60 1BA
Telephone number	01527 872375
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Age group	13-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school moved into new buildings and it also became a specialist Arts and Media school in September 2007. Almost all students are of White British heritage and nearly all have English as their first language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

North Bromsgrove is delivering a sound education to its students. The effective leadership of the headteacher has established a strong common purpose amongst staff. Senior leaders are providing good direction and encouragement, and managers at all levels have ensured a smooth transition from old to new buildings, despite the considerable upheaval and disruption to facilities over the past 18 months. The turnover of staff has reduced significantly in comparison to previous years. Middle managers are now effectively involved in school improvement so that progress is evident in most of the areas in which it is needed. The school has accurately evaluated its overall effectiveness, but has been too generous in its assessment of teaching quality because of insufficient regard to the quality of learning outcomes for students. Governors have an adequate understanding of the quality of provision but do not yet have sufficiently robust means of independently evaluating the quality of outcomes for learners. Taken at all levels, leadership and management are satisfactory.

Students say that they enjoy school a lot, particularly the recently improved sporting and media facilities in the new building. Parents confirm that their children enjoy school. There is good care, guidance and support for all students, and students are developing effective healthy lifestyles. A key reason for students' enthusiasm for school is the good, wide-ranging curriculum that provides opportunities for all abilities and interests. Good arrangements with other local education providers are used well to broaden opportunities. Good liaison with partner middle schools helps students to settle in smoothly.

Students make satisfactory progress, both in the main school and the sixth form, as a result of satisfactory teaching. Much of the teaching is good, exemplified by interesting lesson activities matched to the abilities of each student. But some lessons are pitched at just one level for all students, and some weaker teaching allows too many students to be passive observers in whole-class discussions. Thanks to good school monitoring systems, students know their target examination grades, and their current performance level. However, they do not always know what they need to do to reach their targets.

The impact of specialist media arts status is abundantly clear in the high standard of provision for media arts, including specialist information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, but it has yet to be seen in the wider outcomes for students. There are strong links with the local arts centre and with other schools, and there is a high uptake of students studying media arts both academically and for pleasure.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Leaders in the sixth form effectively promote the personal development and well-being of learners. As in the main school, the care, guidance and support for students make a significant contribution to students' welfare and the creation of a climate that encourages learning. Managers now have a good understanding of what needs to be done to improve standards, by ensuring teachers make more accurate assessments of the day-to-day attainment of students. The school has created a good curriculum that supports learners well. Sixth-form students play an important part in the community life of the school, taking responsibilities for both their own learning and for helping younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all lessons provide students with challenging activities matched to their individual learning needs, irrespective of the class grouping or 'set'.
- Make sure that all students are given clear guidance about what they should do to improve their standards.
- Ensure that the evaluation of the quality of teaching securely focuses on the outcomes in the progress students make in lessons and over time.
- Ensure governors establish an independent and robust means of understanding the impact of provision on the performance of learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The attainment of students on entry to the school in Year 9 is broadly average and, by Year 11, students continue to gain broadly average results in national examinations. Measures of the progress students make, compared to those in similar settings, have been unexceptional in recent years. Overall, this represents satisfactory achievement. There are some particular strengths, for example, English GCSE performance is strong and represents good achievement. Standards in mathematics are rising, although they are still lower than in some other subjects. However, in 2007, results in Key Stage 3 national tests dipped, for reasons that may be linked to the turmoil surrounding the building developments and some staff absence. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Sixth form standards also dipped in 2007, compared to 2006, although they remained broadly average and for the students concerned still represented satisfactory progress. A review by the school identified some factors, such as overgenerous evaluation of students' progress and poor accommodation for personal study, that may have prevented students from doing better.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Their awareness of moral issues is sound and they work well together, for example, in fund raising for charity. Students develop a good awareness of other cultures and religions through the curriculum via links to a school in Africa and through contact with an inner urban school. Their spiritual understanding is not as strong and some students do not always demonstrate a mature respect for other people's thoughts, ideas and beliefs.

The new school building has greatly boosted students' interest in voluntary and additional sporting activities, and participation rates are high. In combination with their healthy food choices, this ensures good healthy outcomes. The school is an orderly environment thanks to the satisfactory behaviour of students overall. However the weaker self-discipline of some students is a barrier to learning in a few lessons, which can lead to low-level misbehaviour and a disregard for the importance of the lesson. Some students and parents identified this as causing them some concern.

Most students enjoy school a lot. Almost all attend regularly but a relatively small number of students have unacceptably poor attendance despite the best efforts of the school to support them. Students respond well to opportunities for contributing to their school community. The work of prefects and the school council is well established. Students' personal attributes and academic standards mean that they are satisfactorily prepared for the world of work.

Sixth form students enjoy their lessons and take responsibility for their progress. They contribute well to the life and work of their community, including working as mentors in other schools. Students are well prepared for further study and employment. Attendance in the sixth form is good.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall and many lessons observed were good or outstanding. A variety of strategies have been introduced to address inconsistencies in teaching quality, but with insufficient focus on evaluating how well students are learning. The best teaching uses good subject knowledge well to support learners. Good lessons include well-planned opportunities for active learning. Consequently, a sense of fun is evident, with students taking pride in the work they produce. Where teaching is most effective, students are confident to contribute to the lesson and evaluate their own work and that of others, taking responsibility for their own learning.

In some of the lessons observed, there was insufficient opportunity for students to learn actively and tasks were not well matched to the range of students' abilities. Students are concerned that in some mixed-ability classes the most able are not provided with work that challenges them. This low demand was also seen in some lessons even where students were grouped according to ability.

In some classes, opportunities are missed to develop independent learning by homework not being set regularly or not always being marked. In some subjects students display a thorough understanding of how their work will be assessed and what is expected at each level or grade. Most students know their target grades, but this is not consistently reinforced by clear advice on how they can improve their work.

Teaching in the sixth form has been satisfactory, as evident from the outcomes of national examinations, although there is also much teaching that is good. Students enjoyed their learning, particularly the opportunities to discuss issues and learn actively. They have positive relationships with their teachers and benefit from the good subject knowledge of staff.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In Year 9 the school provides a broad and balanced range of activities, including offering a second language to more able students, and provides specialist taught drama lessons to all. Fourteen to sixteen-year-olds follow one of three pathways that best matches their needs and abilities and that includes a variety of vocational options. An alternative curriculum supports

those for whom a practical vocational pathway is most appropriate by offering a Young Apprenticeship in combination with courses that enable them to develop teamwork and work-place skills. This option has led to improved behaviour and motivation for some students. The school works well in partnership with other providers to ensure a variety of flexible opportunities and substantial plans are in place for developing this good aspect of the curriculum even further.

In the sixth form, courses include vocational options such as travel and tourism and plans are in place to increase these opportunities through the new Diploma scheme. Almost all students complete their sixth form courses, which is good evidence of their satisfaction and the extent to which the curriculum is meeting their needs.

Students of all ages value the wide variety of enrichment activities that enhance the formal curriculum, particularly in sport and the arts. The school also has a well-established Duke of Edinburgh Award programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support for students are good in both the main school and the sixth form. A wide range of initiatives has led to better tracking and monitoring of progress. One such example is called 'Assertive mentoring', and assigns students to a clear programme of support and additional study with a 'personal mentor' drawn from senior school staff. These students are already responding with improving standards since the start of term. The individual needs of students are well met, particularly those needing additional support. For example, a Year 10 class has designed and produced a children's book with the local nursery, which supports their own literacy skills and those of young people in the community.

Good joint working and cooperation with outside agencies ensure the protection of vulnerable students. The personal care and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. Child protection procedures meet statutory requirements and the school takes all reasonable precautions to ensure that risk assessments and other health and safety procedures are in place.

Students in the sixth form speak highly of the teachers who support their learning and who show real care in the progress they make. They enjoy and value the opportunities they get to work in the wider community to develop the skills and interests they need for later life.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

There is a strong culture of common purpose amongst all the staff thanks to the good leadership of the headteacher and her senior team. They have effectively led the school through the organisational turmoil associated with moving from the old to the new buildings. From a cramped school with restricted external facilities and widely dispersed temporary classrooms, the school now occupies a large, light and airy building. This has lifted the spirits of students and staff alike, and this positive ethos is evident in a substantial increase in extra-curricular activities. The school successfully dealt with a perceived increase in low-level misbehaviour last year,

resulting in a much lower number of current incidents. Staff turnover is significantly lower than in previous years, as is day-to-day staff absence. This suggests that the school is now demonstrating a good capacity for further improvement.

The school has accurately evaluated its overall effectiveness, and clearly understands why its judgement of teaching has been optimistic. There is new leadership in the governing body, although it has been unsuccessful so far in establishing a 'scrutiny' group to independently evaluate school outcomes. The chair is vigorously pursuing this issue, including recent training for governors on interpreting school performance data. Prudent financial management is keeping the school to its current annual budget, although the current leadership team inherited a substantial deficit that has not yet been resolved.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	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

1 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of North Bromsgrove High School, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire B60 1BA

Thank you for your helpful responses and the good-humoured conversations that we enjoyed during our visit to your school. You have quickly adapted to the spectacular new building, and clearly enjoy the new school with all of its extra opportunities and facilities.

Your school is providing a sound education that is ensuring you make satisfactory progress. It has a good curriculum for all ages of students, and teaching and support staff are working well to ensure you get good care, guidance and support. The headteacher and the leadership team have guided the school well since its previous inspection, and are securing an even better future. We think most of you are trying hard to help make the school a safe and orderly place to work, although a few students don't always stay focused on learning in every lesson; this can be distracting for many others.

Teaching is satisfactory, with much that is good. We agree with some of you that some lessons could be more challenging and better matched to the variety of abilities in every class. The school was understandably focused on improving teaching provision since the last inspection. It now needs to check the impact teaching is having upon your progress in lessons, and over time. The systems in place to monitor your progress, and support you if necessary, are good. But in some cases, although you know your targets, we think you could receive clearer advice on how to reach them. Governors are also trying to get more first-hand information about the progress you are making, so they are better placed to support the school's improvement.

With best wishes for your future,

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright Her Majesty's Inspector