

Ounsdale High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124419
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	314925
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick 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	1171
6th form	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Mullock
Headteacher	Paul Jordan
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2004
School address	Ounsdale Road Wombourne Wolverhampton WV5 8BJ
Telephone number	01902 892178
Fax number	01902 892070

Age group	11-18
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Inspection number	314925

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

This above average size school takes students largely from Wombourne, a relatively affluent area on the outskirts of Wolverhampton and Dudley. Just over half of students stay on into the sixth form and an increasing number enter from other schools. Well below average numbers of students are eligible for free school meals. The vast majority of students are of White British background and about 5% come from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The school has less than half the national average proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is about two-thirds of the national average. The school gained performing arts status in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Although the overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory, the senior leadership team have built the foundations needed for further improvement. Talented leaders now occupy important positions in the school and the majority of staff share a common vision for a better school. Results have improved at GCSE and at Key Stage 3 so that attainment is above average overall. Achievement is satisfactory because students enter the school with higher levels of attainment than is the case nationally and make average progress. Although the school is disappointed that achievement is only improving slowly, it should take pride in the improved progress students with learning difficulties make. This success is largely the result of good care, support and guidance and a curriculum that meets the needs of students effectively. The school has established a more effective system for monitoring student progress and earlier action ensures students achieve challenging targets. Good relationships between students and adults ensure students feel cared for and supported.

In all year groups there have been improvements to the curriculum so that the needs of the full ability range are better met. An impressive range of extra-curricular activities, including many associated with the school's performing arts status, add to students' enjoyment of school. Some students lack the independent learning skills they need to progress well in the sixth form and when they leave school. Despite this relative weakness, students' personal development is good because there are significant strengths. For instance, the vast majority of students develop skills needed to do well in the future, live healthy lives, behave very well and contribute positively to the community. School councils have become an important feature of the school, valued by both staff and students. The school is using its performing arts status well to raise standards. Dance, drama and music all demonstrate significantly better outcomes and there is evidence of positive impact on teaching generally and on aspirations in the community.

Satisfactory teaching and learning explain the slow progress made in improving achievement in the school. The school recognises that it currently relies rather too much on extensive revision undertaken late at the end of each key stage. The school is now giving much more attention to ensuring effective teaching that results in better progress in every lesson. There are signs that this is having an impact in many subjects, for instance students in English are appreciative of the effective strategies used to ensure they know how they can achieve their challenging targets. However, there are too many lessons in which the pace is slow with insufficient consideration of the learning needed to ensure good progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory because the school is fully aware of these weaknesses and is rectifying the situation. Unfortunately, progress has been slow resulting in only gradual improvement. For these reasons, the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve. There is recognition that weakness at middle leadership level and difficulties persuading a minority of staff of the virtues of initiatives, undermines initiatives designed to bring about change. As a result, there is some inconsistent implementation of the school's policies and procedures.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is satisfactory. Many students choose to stay at the school rather than go to college, because they value the positive relationships and the

strong support and guidance provided. Students enjoy the sixth form and nearly all complete the courses they begin. The vast majority of students undertake GCEs. Achievement on AS and A-level courses is broadly satisfactory although standards in 2007 were below the national average mainly due to too few students gaining the higher A and B grades. More rigorous monitoring systems and better guidance are helping improve student progress.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Most students appreciate the wide range of subjects available. This represents good provision for students who go on to higher education but it is not as well developed for students who want to follow a vocational pathway in non-arts based courses. This omission affected the recent AS results, where too many students did not gain a grade. Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Students have good opportunities to contribute positively, for instance, a sixth former, through advertisement, application and interview has become the manager of the Breakfast Club. Students responded sensitively and thoughtfully when listening to a fellow student's account of a visit to Auschwitz. The school correctly recognises that some students lack the independent learning skills required to achieve success post-16.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Where teaching is good, lessons challenge and engage students to develop higher-level thinking and promote independent learning. However, this is not consistently the case across all subjects. Some teaching styles that are effective in the main school are less appropriate for the students' level of ability and the much smaller group sizes sometimes found in the sixth form. Leadership and management are satisfactory with some good features. The head of sixth form has gained greater influence and direction since joining the leadership team. There is a clear vision of how the sixth form needs to develop. The introduction of more rigorous use of data, combined with the setting of more challenging targets is raising the aspirations for both students and staff. As in the main school, continued inconsistencies are resulting in slow progress improving achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure greater consistency in teaching so students can achieve their challenging targets in all subjects.
- Ensure greater adherence to the school's policies and procedures.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Attainment is above average and achievement is satisfactory. The most notable improvement is the increase in students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, which has risen from 4% above the national average in 2005 to 15% above in 2007. Other indicators, measuring overall attainment, indicate a more modest improvement in results. Results in 2006 rose strongly because of a rise in achievement. In recent years evidence points to continued satisfactory progress.

Results have improved at Key Stage 3 so that attainment here is also above average although there are some inconsistencies. Results in English are significantly above average because of the good progress students make in this subject. Recent results in mathematics and science are close to the national average, because of the more modest but broadly satisfactory progress students make.

Inspectors found evidence of quite wide variations in the extent students enjoyed different subjects. Students enjoy English and subjects associated with performing arts status far more than modern foreign languages (MFL) and mathematics. However, the school does well in ensuring all groups achieve at least satisfactorily and that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The school has rightly prioritised the need to achieve more grades at the very highest levels in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The full inclusion of students with statements of special needs in activities associated with the school's performing arts status enhances their personal development.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students feel safe and many feel that the school cares for them well. Students learn about other cultures and how to combat racist attitudes through the Comenius project in Year 8 and their personal, social and health education lessons. Students have some opportunities to think about moral and spiritual issues, for example, in a religious education lesson students discussed the role of conscience in making moral decisions. Year 10 students enthusiastically demonstrated their cultural appreciation of Matthew Bourne's adaptation of Swan Lake in a dance lesson. Students' social skills develop well and they are mature in their responses to each other when they work in groups and talk to adults. The school's new approach to managing behaviour and giving rewards is helping to ensure good behaviour. Students take responsibility for themselves and others and value the opportunity to influence decisions through the school council. Students say they enjoy coming to school and think the involvement they have in a wide range of physical and extra-curricular activities suits all. Attendance and punctuality are good and the school is working effectively to reduce authorised absence.

The school guides students well in healthy eating choices. Their involvement in the improvements to dining facilities and menus is good and demonstrates the school's commitment to listening to the student voice. There is a high level of participation in physical activity both through the curriculum and additional activities.

Students prepare well for their future through a well co-ordinated work related learning programme, growing links with local businesses and opportunities to act with enterprise. For example, a Year 8 tutor group organised a Tom Jones tribute event for the local community. Some students do not possess the skills of independent work and this makes it more difficult for them to reach challenging targets.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Although satisfactory overall, there are examples of some good and outstanding practice within the school. Effective lessons are organised to accelerate learning, using a variety of teaching styles and making effective use of assessment. For instance, effective peer and self-assessment in English has contributed to improved outcomes by clarifying what students need to do to achieve higher grades. Less effective lessons are characterised by an over reliance on teacher talk and not enough focus on how students can achieve their challenging targets. In some

lessons the pace of learning slows with some students packing away before the end of the lesson. Opportunities to reinforce key learning are absent and targets are not reviewed.

There are good examples of how the school specialism is being used to support teaching and learning in the wider school. For example, history is being improved through greater use of drama. Leaders have organised training and useful opportunities to share good practice but there is frustration at the reluctance of some departments to fully implement approaches that will improve learning. Parents value the positive moves to engage them further in learning through workshops and other special events. The management of low-level disruption within lessons has improved through the introduction of the '06' system. Students expressed concern that some teachers do not follow these agreed procedures for dealing with behaviour. Inspectors found evidence to support the school's view that teaching is gradually improving.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum has improved in recent years so that it effectively meets the needs of all students. Students are pleased that almost all gain their first choices when opting for different courses. A more appropriate work-related curriculum is developing for a minority of students. The hairdressing or construction focus, developed through good links with other providers, motivates students, and effective arrangements are now in place to ensure good basic skills development is associated with this provision. Modifications to the Key Stage 3 curriculum ensure vulnerable lower attaining students experience a curriculum that eases their transition from primary schools. Early entry information, communication and technology (ICT) GCSE and the new 'learning to learn' course promote important skills needed for the future. All students are positive about the way they are encouraged to participate in a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. Specialist funding is bringing in performance groups, for example, in English, science and MFL.

The curriculum satisfactorily promotes independent learning because many students successfully revise at home using a virtual learning environment. However, some subjects are not promoting high aspirations and developing students' ability to achieve their ambitious targets through independent learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care and support provided for students are consistently effective because the school commits much energy to this aspect of its work. Students are safe during lessons and other activities, and they have an adult to whom they can turn for help. The school provides successful and extensive care for vulnerable young people. Key workers ensure that there is one-to-one support and the newly developed 'Hub' supports students at risk of exclusion, so they are reintegrated into mainstream classes quickly. The support received by the students with learning and personal difficulties ensures that they make good progress. There are some good individual success stories, of which the school is rightly proud. A system for the setting of appropriately challenging targets and the tracking of students' progress is now established. As a result, the quality of academic guidance provided has improved, but varies between departments and individual teachers within departments. There is a clear view of which students are underachieving and need help to catch up. Intervention strategies are more effective because

they take place at an earlier stage. Many students are knowledgeable about their targets and the levels they are attaining but this is not consistent throughout the school. Where assessment for learning and teaching are good, students are given timely guidance on how to improve.

The school meets the government's safeguarding requirements very well. The effective leadership of the teams responsible for students' care, support and personal guidance and their commitment to the students' well-being results in learners who are nearly always confident, co-operative and articulate.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has an accurate self-evaluation that identifies exactly what needs improving. There is an increasingly systematic approach to gaining the views of staff, students and parents. The school is now able to identify how views change, so it has another important source of evidence that can be used to evaluate the impact of planned improvements. Although it is too early to assess the impact of new arrangements at head of year level, inspectors were impressed with the very strong commitment shown to ensuring all students achieve well. There are effective leaders at all levels in the school. However, some heads of department are much less effective. The rate of improvement has been slow because monitoring is not ensuring all staff put the agreed changes in place. For instance, students, governors and parents rightly commented on the variability in the quality of targets identified at review days. Despite these inconsistencies, the school has the expertise required to make the improvements to teaching and learning that will raise standards.

The school has correctly identified that it has had too many priorities in the past and the current plan contains a much more realistic set of priorities. There is now much more consensus about the improvements needed and a decreasing minority of staff resistant to change. Governance is now satisfactory. Governors are aware of the issues confronting the school and their actions have improved the school's finances. There is effective day-to-day management and administration of the school and this largely explains the success dealing with the issues identified at the last inspection.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
---	----------------	-------

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	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	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	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	3
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	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	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	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
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	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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

2 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Ounsdale School, Wombourne WV5 8BJ

We would like to thank all of you for helping us with the recent inspection of your school. Special thanks go to the many students who so willingly gave us their opinions. We discovered that the vast majority of you enjoy school because of the many good opportunities you have to pursue your interests and the good relationships evident between students and adults. We largely agreed with your teachers' views of the school, including that you are well cared for and experience a good curriculum, enhanced by your performing arts specialist school status. Although we agreed that teaching and learning are satisfactory, we recognise that a good number of lessons are better than this.

We agreed with your view that there is too much inconsistency in how your teachers manage students. There is also too much variation in teaching. This explains the key issues for improvement the school has agreed with us. The school will be ensuring all teaching enables you to achieve the ambitious targets you have. In addition, your school's leadership have agreed to ensure all staff implement the school rules and procedures more consistently. You can help by using the school council meetings to let your teachers know how well this is going. We are confident that the school will value your opinions about this.

I wish you all the best for the future and I hope all the revision that Years 9, 11, 12 and 13 students are undertaking pays off.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Sheldrick Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

2 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Ounsdale School, Wombourne WV5 8BJ

We would like to thank all of you for helping us with the recent inspection of your school. Special thanks go to the many students who so willingly gave us their opinions. We discovered that the vast majority of you enjoy school because of the many good opportunities you have to pursue your interests and the good relationships evident between students and adults. We largely agreed with your teachers' views of the school, including that you are well cared for and experience a good curriculum, enhanced by your performing arts specialist school status. Although we agreed that teaching and learning are satisfactory, we recognise that a good number of lessons are better than this.

We agreed with your view that there is too much inconsistency in how your teachers manage students. There is also too much variation in teaching. This explains the key issues for improvement the school has agreed with us. The school will be ensuring all teaching enables you to achieve the ambitious targets you have. In addition, your school's leadership have agreed to ensure all staff implement the school rules and procedures more consistently. You can help by using the school council meetings to let your teachers know how well this is going. We are confident that the school will value your opinions about this.

I wish you all the best for the future and I hope all the revision that Years 9, 11, 12 and 13 students are undertaking pays off.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector