

Droitwich Spa High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116931
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326493
Inspection dates	8–9 October 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	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	12–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1405
Sixth form	243
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Evans
Headteacher	Natalie Waters
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
School address	Briar Mill Droitwich Spa WR9 0AA
Telephone number	01905 774421
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Age group	12–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Droitwich Spa High School is this small town's only secondary school, receiving pupils at the start of Year 8. It is much larger than most secondary schools. About half the national proportion of students are eligible for free school meals, and low proportions of students are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low. The area has favourable socio-economic indicators overall, but that hides very wide variations between different districts in the town.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Droitwich Spa High is a good school. Students achieve well because of the successful combination of the sound teaching of a good curriculum, coupled with good personal development. In addition, all students receive good quality care, guidance and support, in particular those identified as falling behind. As a result, standards and achievement are good in the main school. Boys achieve particularly well because of the effective impact of the specialist sports college provision on all students' motivation, most particularly in Key Stage 4. A skilful balance exists between satisfying their enthusiasm for taking part in sporting activities after school with the duty of students to behave responsibly and complete academic work before play. Students say they enjoy school and feel safe. They behave well, and most of them take part in a wide range of activities that builds their confidence and helps them to make a good contribution to school and the wider community. Healthy food and a very pleasant and well-managed dining room atmosphere ensure students who partake of school meals eat well.

Teaching is satisfactory, with much that is good. Assessment practice in some subjects is exemplary, so that teachers and their students know current standards precisely, and what steps students must take to improve further. This advice is not available to students in every class, nor rigorously followed up in subsequent lessons. The good school-wide system for tracking progress ensures all teachers know the prior attainments of their students. However, this information is not consistently used to plan lessons with tasks matched to that prior attainment, or to take on board what students already know. As a result, too many lessons have the same task planned for all learners, with any differences in students' capability presumed to emerge as different outcomes or responses. This is not challenging enough for the more able students within any class, irrespective of the average ability of that class, including in the sixth form.

Good leadership by the new headteacher has quickly reinforced the school's behaviour management system by firm and consistent application of its codes. As a result, students know that good behaviour is properly valued, and shortfalls are dealt with quickly. New teachers to the school receive very good support. Existing staff confirm a supportive professional development environment, which in no small part arises from the very extensive teacher training and professional development programme run by the school. Other managers have effectively ensured good progress during the change of headteacher. The school has a good capacity to improve. However, although satisfactory overall, there has been some delay in responding to matters arising from a financial audit. The school does not have a policy to promote community cohesion.

Sports College Specialist status

This has provided many opportunities for students to be valued and to become leaders in the school and wider community, for example by students organising clubs and events inside school and within the local feeder system. It has increased international contacts and fostered a wider understanding of sport and education abroad. The development of motivation among students emanates from the high quality of expertise and work in the sports faculty. The department has helped to enhance the skills of teachers directly within sport and other subjects through evaluation and discussion of effective teaching approaches. Funding has been used wisely to improve the number of facilities, such as the student support centre, and in supporting outreach workers working with teachers in the feeder schools.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides a satisfactory quality of education. Inspectors agree with the school's own evaluation that standards in the sixth form are broadly average, and represent satisfactory progress. Arrangements for independent study have become more focused recently and students value the opportunities offered by their teachers for one-to-one support. Students feel comfortable and secure in the sixth form, take opportunities to contribute to managing their own environment, take leadership of school functions, for example mentoring younger pupils, and serve the wider community through charity work and service on the town council. Links with external organisations such as universities and employers are well managed to offer students appropriate programmes of visiting speakers and careers guidance on request.

Students are set targets on entry to sixth form that are monitored every term, but many of these targets are then revised upwards, suggesting the need for more rigorous use of data on prior attainment to set challenging targets in the first place. The school leadership team is beginning to take a more rigorous approach to monitoring and improving retention rates; currently, less than half of Year 11 students stay on. The school is planning a more diverse range of courses that would meet a wider range of needs and interests beyond the traditional predominance of A-level subjects that currently serve the majority of students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan lessons to meet the varied needs, interests and prior knowledge of all the students in the class, including gifted and talented students and those with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Make sure marking consistently informs all students of what they should do to improve their work, in small and manageable steps, and ensure they follow that advice.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The attainment of students when they join the school has been slowly rising, but remains broadly average. In the 2007 national Key Stage 3 tests, standards were slightly lower than average, as a result of achievement declining to satisfactory from the very good in 2005. Early and incomplete figures for 2008 already show that standards will be at least the same as in 2007, and better in English.

Standards at Key Stage 4 in 2007 were broadly average on all measures, higher than in 2005 when they were just below average, and rising faster than the national rate. Boys did as well as girls, as a result of their particularly good progress. Girls' progress was also above average but not significantly so; nevertheless, overall achievement at Key Stage 4 was good, and has been improving since 2005. The school identified mathematics as being the weaker of the core subjects, and provisional 2008 results suggest this remains unresolved, although other results are in line with the school's expectations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support, and all make at least satisfactory progress. Those with a statement of special education needs or on the school action plus register achieve well.

Standards in 2007 were a little below average for GCE A-level and AS-level, particularly for boys. This did, however, represent satisfactory progress for those students. Inspectors agree with the school that the achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Droitwich Spa High School has a strong community ethos and the personal development of its students is good. Students say they enjoy school and this is evident in their good behaviour around school and positive attitudes to learning, even where teaching is occasionally mundane. They are sharply aware of the renewed emphasis on behaviour since the appointment of the new headteacher, and welcome this clarity of expectations. Attendance is satisfactory although the persistently poor attendance of a few students is proving difficult to resolve. The school has strategies in place to tackle this, such as the rewards system for good attendance and calls to parents on the first day of absence. Students have an unusually good personal awareness of cultures across the world because the school has built positive relationships with schools abroad through its specialist school work. Student fund raising is often directed towards helping with these partnerships abroad. Their understanding of life in multicultural Britain is satisfactory.

Students say they feel safe and most adopt healthy lifestyles. They can point to a reduction in bullying, they know what to do if there is a problem, and report that these rare instances are sorted out effectively. Students have many opportunities to contribute to the school community as well as the community outside. Many are given responsibilities, such as those in Years 12 and 13 operating the buddy system, the appointment of year leaders, membership of the school council and the many opportunities within sport for students to support the development of skills of other young people. The preparation of students for the workplace is satisfactory. They are well advised about future opportunities and work-related learning is particularly strong in Key Stage 4, but this is balanced by the satisfactory outcomes of key skills in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some good features in all age groups and subjects. Common to all the lessons observed by inspectors were very good relationships between teachers and students that permitted a culture of enquiry to flourish, with students appropriately challenged by well-planned and interesting activities. In some lesson plans, learning outcomes for different abilities of students enable students to recognise their progress in learning. However, no plans identified different tasks for different abilities of students at the outset, for example by taking account of the previous lesson's different outcomes. This lack of explicit tasks for different students, even where plans identify that some students have particular needs or gifts, is one reason why teaching overall is satisfactory rather than good, including in sixth form lessons. Some good assessment practice occurs, including extended research work in science (known as 'Badgers' by the students), although this is not yet embedded across the school or within departments. As a result, many students do not understand the level at which they are working nor the steps they need to take to improve their work to achieve their targets.

Teachers' expert subject knowledge enables them to explain and illustrate difficult topics well. For example, a teacher showed students how to become emotionally engaged with their work in a Year 12 art lesson, mimicking the technique of Jackson Pollack. Good use of ICT by teachers occurs in some lessons. For example, in a vocational sports lesson, a teacher used 'freeze-frame' techniques to promote discussion and provide evidence for the class to develop their reasoned

arguments. In some classrooms and open areas, displays enhance and celebrate students' achievements, for example in design and technology, but the majority of classrooms and corridors are bare, or have very limited displays of exemplar work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum in the main school is well planned and expanding to further meet a wider range of needs and interests, particularly vocational pathways. For example, students are given the opportunity to gain health and safety qualifications within their Key Stage 4 programme. The curriculum engages almost all the students and enables them to achieve successful outcomes. This is clearly apparent in the very high proportion of students gaining at least five GCSE passes in 2007. There is good provision for students who would otherwise be at risk of exclusion.

Curriculum development has been enhanced by the impact of specialist status, with sports courses and enrichment opportunities taken up by large numbers of students. The school has resolved previous concerns about religious education for all students at Key Stage 4, and therefore meets statutory requirements. Progression routes are well established, with external links for work-related curriculum developments being a particular strength. This is evident in the high proportion of students who move into education, training or employment after Year 11. Work is continuing to improve the satisfactory curriculum in the sixth form to meet more effectively the requirements of the large proportion of students who currently leave for other settings.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Rigorous processes for tracking students' progress enable the school to identify quickly those students requiring additional support and to put in place effective strategies to support them. Pupils are guided to assess their own progress using regular interim reports, which creates ownership of performance. A student commented: 'I would not have been able to move two grades without the support of my tutor.' Students know their targets in terms of expected grades; however, step-by-step guidance on how to reach them is insufficiently robust. In the sixth form, students are given target grades based on the progress achieved by previous years, but these presume satisfactory progress and are not challenging enough. This is the reason for the satisfactory judgement overall for this aspect in the sixth form.

The sensitive support for students at risk of exclusion, with English as an additional language, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a great strength of the school's provision. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have clear individual education plans that are reviewed regularly. Good links with external services provide specialist support where it is needed. However, provision for gifted and talented students is limited at present. Students appreciate the careful attention placed on supporting them at key points, such as when they join the school. There are comprehensive child protection and health and safety procedures to ensure the safety of students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

In a short time, the new headteacher has effectively set out what she requires of teachers and students, most obviously in the way that the behaviour management system has been stiffened up so that students are much more confident that good behaviour will prevail and disruption reduce. Staff are confident of advice and support, and value the ease with which they can directly share views with the headteacher. Good leadership from middle managers has maintained standards during 2008 as the headship post changed hands via a term of acting headship, although the relative weakness in mathematics remains, at least in part. The school has identified the main strengths and weaknesses of its provision, but held generous views of the effectiveness of its sixth form that were not fully grounded in the outcomes for learners, despite their accurate evaluation of satisfactory sixth form achievement.

Governance is satisfactory. The chair and vice-chair pay frequent visits to the school, and some lessons, and are rightly promoting the value of such 'hands-on' visits to other governors. There have been shortfalls in the management of finance. These were identified by the local authority audit in 2007, and went unresolved until recently. Governing body minutes contain little by way of evaluative judgements of the school's academic performance, and acceptance of what in reality are quite low retention rates in the sixth form.

Despite the lack of a formal policy, the school is promoting community cohesion satisfactorily, mainly through its good programme of international links that involve all the students in gaining a practical understanding of the wider world community. It is complemented through the work students do with partner feeder schools as part of the school's specialist sports college status. Not enough is done to raise awareness of life in modern multicultural Britain.

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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?	2	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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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	3

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 eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Droitwich Spa High School, Droitwich, WR9 0AA

Thank you for your positive responses, and very helpful approach to answering our questions during the inspection.

Droitwich Spa High is a good school, thanks to the hard work and dedication of your teachers and support staff, and your positive motivation to learn well, particularly at Key Stage 4. This school is a delightful place to learn, and we are pleased to note that almost all of you really enjoy school life. The rich curriculum has given you many opportunities to develop confidence, and this is mainly the result of the sports college status of your school. This has also brought you into personal contact with the wider international world, and that will benefit your future understanding of the global community in which we all live. Boys, in particular, make good progress throughout the main school, and girls are achieving well in most cases so that students in Key Stage 4 make better than expected progress overall. Sixth form progress is satisfactory, which in turn makes the sixth form a sound place to study. However, boys are not doing quite as well as girls in the sixth form.

We agree with you, and your teachers, that the headteacher has made a sharp improvement to day-to-day behaviour, which is good, and we have every confidence in her and her team to improve the school still further.

The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory, and often good, but we think two features of day-to-day teaching should be present in most lessons in order to make your progress even better in all areas of the school. First, teachers should consistently give each of you tasks in lessons that both challenge and interest you at your level, and take account of what you can already do. Second, when they mark work to assess your current performance, the advice they give should make it plain what you should do to improve the work. You should ensure that you take note of that advice, by correcting the work or having another go at it. This is already happening in several subjects.

Best wishes for your future

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright Her Majesty's Inspector