

Wolgarston High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124415
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	328133
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Dorothy Bathgate 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	803
Sixth form	157
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steve Askew
Headteacher	Mr Philip Tapp
Date of previous school inspection	2 February 2006
School address	Cannock Road Penkridge Stafford Staffordshire ST19 5RX
Telephone number	01785 355500
Fax number	01785 355534

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

Wolgarston High School is an age 13 to 18 school, with Year 9 as the main year of entry. The school is smaller than most secondary schools, but with a relatively large sixth form. The great majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The proportions of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are eligible for free school meals are both well below national averages. The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is just below the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is much lower than the national average. The school has a Leading Parent Partnership award, an International School award and Healthy Schools status. It was redesignated as a specialist technology college in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wolgarston High School is a good and improving school. Since the previous inspection the school has significantly improved both its provision and the outcomes for its students and provides good value for money. This is the result of strong, determined and purposeful leadership in the school especially that of the headteacher, combined with the dedication of the school's staff. The supportive and knowledgeable governing body underpins all the school does.

The school has successfully created a lively, harmonious and welcoming community, in which students flourish. This is reflected in their good personal development. Students speak warmly of how much they enjoy and value their education. This view is shared by the vast majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of students attend regularly, are punctual to their lessons and display excellent behaviour. The school has developed a culture which values and actively promotes healthy lifestyles. As a result, students are well aware of how to remain safe and healthy. They make a strong, positive contribution to the school community through the school council and by older students taking on positions of responsibility. However, although the student's social and moral development is good, opportunities to promote their cultural and spiritual development are limited. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion through its involvement in the local community and its excellent learning partnerships. The impact of exciting projects such as the youth event, confirm the school's success in this area.

As a result of improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and in the use of assessment, most lessons are now good. Consequently, pupils make good progress and are reaching higher standards. However, the sharing of this good practice is not yet fully embedded across the whole school. Additionally, in some lessons, work is not always matched carefully enough to the learners' needs. There is very effective use of technology to enhance learning which has been a priority for development through the specialist status. The curriculum is good and supports the learning and personal development of students well in most respects.

The pastoral care of the students is outstanding. A highly effective house system with vertical tutor groups and house tutors fosters strong and supportive relationships amongst students and their peers, as well as with students and tutors. Consequently, staff know the students extremely well and students are confident that there is always a member of staff to turn to for help and support. The Family and Student Services Centre has been widely recognised both locally and nationally for its outstanding support to both students and their wider families. Comprehensive tracking of progress, linked to individual target setting, provides students with good academic guidance.

Impressive teamwork at all levels, a genuine pride for the school among both staff and students, and good progress since the previous inspection, demonstrate that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good sixth form that is well led and managed, ensuring that students really enjoy their studies and succeed. Inspection evidence indicates that achievement and standards at all levels of study are good overall. However, the progress made by the A-level students in 2008 was excellent and the school is rightly proud of their outstanding results. Students are guided carefully about course options and a good curriculum provides them with a range of options at both AS and A level, as well as vocational pathways. Students' academic studies are well coordinated with a good range of extra-curricular activities, many of which raise the profile of the sixth form and the school in the community. Personal development is outstanding overall, with proper attention to the need for a healthy lifestyle, in a safe environment. Good teaching underpins students' successes. Lively interaction between teachers and students, in which mutual trust and respect are fundamental in promoting a lively academic enthusiasm, leads to good progress. Outstanding academic and pastoral support helps students to do as well as they can, and they regularly progress both to employment and to further study, including many highly respected universities.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to share good practice in teaching and assessment processes to ensure these are embedded across the whole school.
- Ensure work is always carefully matched to the learners' needs to meet the school's aspiration of personalised learning.
- Initiate and develop opportunities for spiritual and cultural development more widely.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with standards of attainment that are just above those found nationally. Highly effective transition arrangements ensure that students get off to a good start, with no dip in their progress in the first year at Wolgarston. At the end of Key Stage 3, students attain standards in the national tests that are well above average and have been so consistently from 2006. The unvalidated results for 2008 indicate that this position has been maintained. Results in the GCSE examinations have improved significantly since 2006. The proportion gaining five or more passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is significantly above average. Almost every student leaves with five or more passes at GCSE. The progress that students make is good and this reflects the impact of the specialist college status on driving improvement. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the high quality support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students display good personal qualities. They demonstrate that they are polite, show respect for others and are able to empathise with others, as well as express their feelings and views. Incidents of bullying or other forms of harassment are extremely rare. Attendance is excellent, being well above the national average for

secondary schools. Students enjoy school, are enthusiastic about accepting responsibility and are proud ambassadors for Wolgarston. They have a good understanding of the factors contributing to healthy living and an excellent understanding of how to stay safe. The impact of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology opportunities across the school ensures that students are developing good workplace skills. By the time students reach Years 12 and 13, they are confident and mature young people, keen to make a contribution to their school and its wider communities.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Although there is a rich variety of extra-curricular opportunities which includes trips, visits and links with foreign schools, there are limited planned, daily opportunities for reflection, or for contrasting the school with the national community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. Staff morale is high and there is a widely shared commitment to raising standards. Staff are being well supported by a strong programme of professional development. Most of the lessons observed were good or better and these lessons were characterised by lively pace, a variety of teaching strategies to support diverse learning styles, confident subject knowledge, positive relationships between staff and students and effective use of assessment. However, the sharing of this good practice is not yet fully embedded to ensure consistency across the whole school. In a small number of lessons observed, work was not always well matched to the learners' needs. This limited the opportunities for students to develop skills and habits of independent learning and did not fully promote the school's aspiration of personalised learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum promotes good achievement and serves the needs and aspirations of all students. The school is rightly proud of the way it has successfully developed and enhanced its curriculum through its technology status. The specialist subjects make a significant and positive contribution to the curriculum and achievement. The school has introduced a range of pathways at Key Stage 4, including vocational programmes. This helps to maintain interest and provides appropriate challenge for all students. There is good alternative provision for the small number of students for whom the mainstream is not appropriate. The curriculum supports the development of the students' basic skills well. Links with local businesses and opportunities for work experience enable students to apply their skills in enterprise, which prepares them well for their future working lives. There is a good uptake of extra-curricular provision which includes sports activities, music and drama, general interest clubs and visits in this country and abroad.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students know they are extremely well supported and valued as individuals. They greatly appreciate the prompt, effective support they are given by their tutors, as well as the wide range of support services available to them through the Family and Student Services Centre. The system of mixed-age mentor groups within the house system strengthens the cohesiveness of the school community with older students supporting younger ones. Safeguarding procedures are robust and relevant training regularly updated. Systems to monitor and improve attendance are thorough and having an extremely positive impact. A notable strength of the school is its inclusiveness, which is promoted effectively through a culture of mutual respect. The progress of students is tracked and monitored carefully so that any underachievement can be rapidly identified. Consequently, personalised learning programmes have enabled many vulnerable students to make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher has an exceptionally clear vision for the school which has resulted in rapid and consistent improvement. He is ably supported by an extended senior leadership team and together they work tirelessly to ensure that the school's vision drives the school forward with improvement constantly in mind. The use of challenging targets has resulted in a rapid improvement in standards since the last inspection. The processes of self-evaluation are accurate and are resulting in the identification of clear and appropriate priorities for development. The specialist status has been used well to contribute to raising standards and to improving the quality of teaching. The shared sense of purpose and the proven record of sustained improvement reflect good capacity for improvement. Excellent partnerships with local schools, colleges and other agencies have been effectively enhanced by the specialist college status. Governors robustly support and challenge the school to ensure it meets its priorities.

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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	2
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	
Personal development and well-being		
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
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	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	



6 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Wolgarston High School, Pendridge, Stafford, ST19 5RX

Thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with many of you. We also read carefully the questionnaires completed by your parents. These were very helpful to us. Wolgarston is a good school and we agree with those of you we met who told us that some aspects are excellent. The governors, headteacher and all the staff are committed to your success both in terms of examination results and supporting your wider personal development into mature adults.

We were particularly impressed by the positive atmosphere in the school and the very good relationships between all groups of students and especially the respect you show to each other and to your teachers. You make a very positive contribution to the success of the school through your attitudes, excellent behaviour and enthusiasm for learning. Attendance at the school is excellent and you are to be congratulated on this.

In thinking about the successes of your school we picked out a number of other important things. The courses available to you at Key Stage 4 are good and match well with your interests and ambitions for the future. The pastoral care and guidance available to you are excellent and many of you told us how much you appreciate and value this. The school has very strong links with the wider community and this helps you to be part of the drive to promote positive harmony in the local area.

The senior leaders are continuing to bring fresh ideas for the future to make sure the school continues to improve and the needs of all students are met as well as possible. We have asked the school to do the following in order to ensure this improvement continues.

- Make sure that good teaching and assessment processes are evident in all your lessons.
- Make sure that work is always carefully matched to your learning needs.
- Plan and provide more opportunities for your spiritual and cultural development.

Thank you again for welcoming us to your school. We wish you well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Dorothy Bathgate
Her Majesty's Inspector