

# Wolstanton High School

Milehouse Lane, Newcastle, ST5 9JU

## Inspection dates

15–16 October 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although the school's GCSE results have improved in many subjects, the rate of students' progress in mathematics has been too slow.
- Teachers do not always use all the information they have about students' abilities and previous learning to plan activities that challenge them from the start of lessons. This restricts their progress, particularly in the case of the more able.
- Students are sometimes too passive in lessons because they are not given enough opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning through independent and group work.
- Teachers' marking does not give students enough precise information about how the work can be completed to a high enough standard and some teachers do not check that suggested improvements have been made.

### The school has the following strengths

- The progress being made by students currently in the school is much better because the quality of teaching is improving rapidly.
- Leaders and managers at all levels share a vision for the students that ensures underachievement is not accepted and underperformance by teachers quickly tackled.
- Leaders make effective checks on learning, and provide appropriate training and other opportunities for teachers to learn from the best practice already present in the school.
- Leaders and managers, with the support of the local authority, have improved all the areas for improvement identified in the previous report.
- Literacy skills are improving because all teachers incorporate them into their lessons.
- Behaviour is managed consistently by all staff and, as a result, the school is a safe, purposeful place with a good learning atmosphere.
- The governing body effectively holds the school to account, knows its strengths and weaknesses and is impatient for improvement.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide strong and thoughtful leadership that is rapidly turning the school into a thoughtful and purposeful learning community.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons, of which six were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of shorter visits to lessons to look at specific aspects of lessons.
- Meetings were held with school staff, including middle leaders and senior leaders, a representative of the local authority, three groups of students and with representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the 48 responses to the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) and other communications with parents, such as phone calls and letters, which helped inspectors to focus on particular aspects of the school's work.
- 25 staff questionnaires were received and inspectors considered the responses to these.
- They observed the work of the school, spoke informally with students and looked at a number of documents, including documentation about how the school manages and improves teaching and decides on pay, records relating to attendance, behaviour and the monitoring of the quality of teaching, minutes of governors' meetings and documents relating to safeguarding.

## Inspection team

Simon Blackburn, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Douglas Folan	Additional Inspector
Helen Booth	Additional Inspector
Anne McAvan	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average secondary school.
- Almost all students are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of students believed to speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is below the national average. This is additional government funding for students in local authority care, those known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is above average but the proportion supported through school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school uses alternative off-site provision to support its students through the Staffordshire 'RAISE' service, which provides additional vocational options for students in Key Stage 4. Currently, just one student attends the courses provided.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for student's attainment and progress.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it matches the best in school by ensuring that teachers:
  - give students more frequent opportunities to develop their own understanding of ideas and concepts by working on open-ended tasks both independently and in small groups
  - use their knowledge of students' ability levels to provide work that stretches every individual and particularly the most able students
  - provide precise written feedback to students about their work so that they know exactly how to work towards meeting their targets
  - check that students act on the marking and other feedback they are given.
- Increase the rate at which students make progress in mathematics by ensuring that all teachers:
  - challenge all students to achieve their best through work which matches their ability closely
  - reduce the amount of time that they spend teaching the same thing to the whole group
  - give students the opportunity to talk to one another about the solutions they find to problems.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Standards have not been strong enough over time. They fell in 2012 and although they rose last year as a result of strongly improved teaching and the provision of a broader range of subjects designed to interest all students, the latest results at GCSE are still only average.
- Standards in English have been broadly similar to the national average over time, even though results in 2013 show an increase in attainment to above the national average. Standards in mathematics remained stable in 2013 and were still no better than average.
- Students who completed Year 11 in 2013 made only average progress in English and less than average progress in mathematics. More able pupils do not always make as much progress as they are capable of.
- Leaders and managers have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics and lesson observations and work in students' books shows that students currently in the school are now making much better progress in mathematics. Students currently in Key Stage 4 are expected to complete Year 11 having made progress which is better than the national average. The rate of progress in most other subjects, and particularly in science, has also increased as a result of improvements in teaching.
- Those pupils who joined the school with lower ability levels in English and mathematics make better progress through the school than other students.
- Increasingly effective use is made of the additional funding available to reduce the achievement gap between students supported by the pupil premium and other students. In 2012, eligible students finishing Year 11 were about three terms behind other students in a range of subjects and further behind in English and mathematics. The school's own tracking data shows that the gap is narrowing and that, currently, eligible students are now no more than a term behind in both subjects.
- Girls have generally performed better than boys in examinations in the past but boys' performance improved in 2013, and both boys' and girls' attainment and progress were close to the national averages for their group. In lessons and in students' work, there are now few discernible differences and the school constantly checks that students are working towards their targets, and intervening effectively when they show signs of falling short.
- The majority of students were entered early for GCSE examinations in mathematics in Year 10. The school ensures that this policy does not put a ceiling on students' progress and attainment by insisting that those students who do not reach their target grade take the examination again in Year 11. School records show that a greater proportion of students who took their mathematics early made better progress than those who did not.
- The well-established systems for the identification and support of disabled students and those with special educational needs ensure that they make progress which is similar to other students in the school and in some cases better.
- There are too few students currently following courses off-site to comment on their achievement without the risk of publicly identifying them.

**The quality of teaching** requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it is not consistently good.
- In a small number of lessons where teaching requires improvement, teachers do not use all the information they have about students' abilities and their previous learning to plan activities that challenge them from the very start of lessons. In these lessons, and occasionally in others, teachers spend too long talking to the whole class before the students are given independent work to complete and this prevents students making all the progress they might.
- In some mathematics lessons, the work is not well enough planned to ensure that individuals can make the best possible progress because the whole class are asked to undertake the same tasks. Generally, lesson observations conducted by inspectors show that some lessons are pitched at middle and lower ability students and that teachers do not routinely plan activities that fully challenge the most able in their classes.
- Teachers mark students' work frequently but students do not receive enough precise guidance about how to improve their work from the feedback that teachers give them. Marking in the English department is routinely responded to by students and their responses are checked by their teachers to ensure that they have made the suggested improvements. This is not standard practice in the rest of the school. However, marking rarely misses opportunities to correct mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar because the school has made the improvement of literacy skills a major priority.
- Teaching in the mathematics department is showing signs of strong improvement as a result of the appointment of new staff and the greater emphasis now being given to what students need to achieve over a sequence of lessons. Targets are well known by students and they receive clear information about how well they are working towards them. Students are not given enough time to talk about their mathematics learning and to share each other's approaches to solving problems.
- Students told inspectors that they enjoy lessons most when they are given the chance to work independently or in small groups on challenging tasks that allow them to decide which way their learning will go, depending on what they find out. They also said that opportunities to do this were not frequent and inspectors found this to be the case. Where group work was very successful, for example in a Year 10 drama lesson, students were also asked to assess their own and other groups' work and they made insightful and constructive judgements which led to further improvement.
- The school has made good progress in improving literacy skills across the school. Many lessons were observed where students read and read out loud and the teacher ensured that errors were corrected or the delivery was modified to fit the subject matter and audience. Teachers also take the time to highlight subject-specific key words and to discuss the most appropriate structures and writing styles for the work students are completing. This was the case in an outstanding science lesson about genetics where students completed a piece of extended writing about natural selection and made rapid progress as a result of the focus on the literacy skills they needed to develop. A quite delightful technique, using 'Reading dogs', whereby reluctant readers are encouraged to read aloud to placid Golden Retrievers has been used particularly well to build these pupils' confidence. Students, and particularly boys, make great strides with their reading when they have an audience that listens intently without judging their progress.
- Most teaching is lively and engages students' interest. Teachers use a range of strategies to

make learning interesting which students tell us they appreciate. Teachers use questioning well to test students' knowledge and to challenge their understanding and to apply their learning in new situations. Teachers' subject knowledge is increasingly strong in all areas and they often model the high quality of work that they want students to achieve.

- Teachers and teaching assistants or learning mentors work well together to ensure that the lessons that are planned match the needs of students who require extra help, with the result that they gain in confidence and make similar progress to other students in lessons.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is consistently good. During the inspection, heavy rain meant that most students were inside during break and lunchtime but the corridors had a feeling of community and friendliness and students moved around with courtesy and calm. Students take full advantage of the areas that have been set aside for them to congregate in, with bean bags in corridor corners proving very popular.
- Most parents who responded to the parent view online survey or who wrote to the inspection team consider the school to be safe and students' behaviour to be good. This was also the unanimous view of staff who returned a questionnaire. These views are shared by the students themselves. Students have a full awareness of the school rules and think they are applied fairly and consistently. Inspectors observed teachers using the rules and agreed that behaviour has improved because of the consistent approach that is taken by all adults in the school. All incidents are carefully recorded and followed up and the school uses restorative practices to solve disputes. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of exclusions from the school.
- Students are taught about different forms of bullying, including homophobic and racist bullying, and know what to do if they experience it or witness it. Assemblies regularly encourage students to think about the moral dimension of the decisions they make and to recognise their own responsibility in promoting fairness in the school. Students who spoke to inspectors were clear that the Year 10 Buddies and Year 11 prefects play an important role in giving students people of their own age to talk to about any problems they may have.
- Students display positive attitudes to learning. They are punctual, well equipped for learning and settle quickly to tasks with enthusiasm. Some students are a little passive in their learning because they are not given enough responsibility for managing tasks and deciding on the pace of their work.
- Students' attendance is in line with the national average, although there was a slight dip in the last academic year. The school works hard with parents and other services to reduce the number of students who have low attendance.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- Leadership and management are good because the headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body have been successful in addressing the areas for improvement from the previous inspection and in ensuring that the quality of teaching has improved. Although teaching and achievement are not yet good, the robust monitoring of the quality of teaching, together with well-targeted training is ensuring that achievement in both key stages is increasing rapidly.

- The headteacher has a clear and uncompromising vision for all students to achieve their best and to develop into caring and ambitious young people. This vision is embodied in the leadership structure of the school which effectively combines these two principles and all staff, parents and governors share this vision. He and his deputy headteacher provide strong leadership that is bringing all the staff together with a common purpose.
- The school's self-evaluation is wide ranging, focuses clearly on the current situation and is accurate. The views of students and parents are sought and used to improve the school. The parents' forum is popular and well attended. Parents bring concerns and challenges and the school provides detailed information about how children are taught. This allows the school to adjust its plans and has led to improvements in the management of behaviour. Any parent who comes forward with a complaint is invited to join the parents' forum on resolution of the issue.
- The results of self-evaluation feed directly into the school improvement plan. This highlights appropriate priorities for improvement with clear lines of responsibility and action points. Where plans are less robust is in providing milestones for success and timelines so that governors and others can clearly judge what progress is being made towards the objectives.
- The school's team of subject leaders model good practice in teaching and provide good leadership to their teams. Their role in monitoring the work of their departments is well defined and they use a wide range of evidence to check on the quality of teaching and the progress of students.
- The quality of teaching is improving rapidly because the school has effective systems for using lesson observations, learning walks, book checks and the student voice to provide a strong body of evidence with which to target training for teachers. A system of master classes, taught by a range of teachers in the school, has recently been added to the training programme and ensures that the good practice that is increasingly being identified is shared by all teachers.
- The formal performance management system is also making a strong contribution to improving teaching rapidly. Rigorous targets are set for teachers and any underperformance is quickly challenged. Teachers appreciate this and particularly the support they are given through the high quality and frequent professional development opportunities the school provides. Senior leaders, with governors, have managed reductions in staffing sensitively and introduced a new leadership structure that reflects the school vision and provides clear staff development opportunities.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and offers a wide range of subjects that are of interest to students. It is organised into pathways that reflect the abilities and aptitudes of students and is carefully adjusted to meet individual needs. Off-site alternative provision is used for only one student currently, and this is also well managed with constant checks on behaviour and attendance as well as progress through the course. Students benefit from plenty of opportunities to understand different people's beliefs through a programme of exchange visits, trips and visitors to the school which also contribute strongly to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The additional funding the school has received through its pupil premium budget has been used effectively and with good impact to provide additional teaching for students as well as learning mentors who undertake one-to-one and small group activities for those at risk of underachieving. The impact of the Year 7 Catch Up Premium is monitored closely by the deputy headteacher. Funding is used to provide a dedicated Key Stage 3 learning mentor who identifies students in need of extra help and a PE initiative that combines fitness and literacy in an early morning club.
- The local authority works very purposefully with the school to provide well targeted support in a

range of areas. Support in science has helped that department to raise attainment and progress sharply, while behaviour management support and support for literacy developments have successfully helped the school address the areas for improvement from the last inspection.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and give a strong steer on the strategic direction of the school by working closely with the senior leaders. They ask challenging questions about the school's performance and are impatient for improvement. When they have concerns, they are expressed in meetings and they follow this up rapidly with visits to the school to gain first hand evidence of the actions being taken to improve the aspect causing concern. Governors are aware of the actions taken to improve teaching and often attend training days to gain a greater understanding of the impact of monitoring and development. They know that teachers only advance on pay scales if their performance warrants it and they have supported the headteacher in taking difficult decisions when underperformance persists. They manage the budget well and know the impact that the pupil premium is having on reducing the effects of disadvantage although are less clear about how the Year 7 Catch-up funding is used. The budget is well managed and governors make sure that all safeguarding requirements are met.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124414
<b>Local authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	427189

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11-16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	865
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sandra Hambleton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Alan Aston
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13 May 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01782 297725
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