



Nether Stowe High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124409
LEA Staffordshire
Inspection number 282924
Inspection dates 5 December 2005 to 6 December 2005
Reporting inspector Susan Morris-KingHMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	St Chad's Road
School category	Community		Lichfield
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Staffordshire WS13 7NB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01543 263 446
Number on roll	950	Fax number	01543 414602
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Paul Southern
Date of previous inspection	29 September 1997	Headteacher	Mr Barry Copper

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	5 December 2005 - 6 December 2005	282924

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

When Nether Stowe High School was inspected in January 2004 it was judged to be providing a poor standard of education, and therefore to require special measures. The school was subsequently visited on three occasions by HMI prior to this inspection to monitor its progress.

Nether Stowe is an average-sized mixed comprehensive school situated near the centre of Lichfield. Local pupils come from a variety of areas, including the most deprived and the most affluent wards of Staffordshire. Some pupils travel to the school by train from central Birmingham. Over 90% of the pupils are from White British backgrounds, although a number of minority ethnic groups are also represented in the school. A few pupils are bi-lingual. An average proportion of pupils has learning difficulties or disabilities, although the proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Need is above average. Pupils' attainment when they join the school at the start of Year 7 is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Nether Stowe High School has undergone a period of rapid improvement. At the time of the last inspection, too much teaching was inadequate, pupils' progress was not good enough and poor behaviour and attitudes too often interfered with learning. A new headteacher joined the school in April 2004. Since then, highly focused work by the headteacher, the senior team and the staff has led to significant improvements in all aspects of provision. These positive changes are much appreciated by the pupils and parents.

Greatly improved teaching is beginning to have an impact on the progress which pupils are making, especially at Key Stage 3, although some underachievement still remains, particularly among boys at Key Stage 4. Pupils are well behaved. Attitudes to lessons are good throughout the school and pupils take a pride in their learning. Pupils' involvement in lessons is much better, although this remains one of the school's identified priorities. There are positive relationships between staff and pupils. In many lessons there are high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and they respond well to these. Systems for tracking pupils' progress are good. Assessment has improved, but is not always frequent or accurate enough to ensure that teachers and pupils are clear about what needs to be learnt next. Pupils are very well cared for; systems for guidance and support are well organised and well led. Pupils have many opportunities to participate in enrichment activities and have taken seriously their responsibilities for helping to improve their school. Parents are given good quality information about their children's progress, although the school has rightly identified that parental involvement could be further improved. Rigorous and regular self-evaluation has ensured that the school has a very accurate view of its own strengths and priorities: the school's capacity to improve is good.

The school has worked hard to improve its accommodation and resources from a low starting point, and the headteacher and governors have well-developed plans to continue to do so. The local authority has provided effective professional and financial support. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

Grade: 3

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

The recently appointed head of sixth form has made a good start to ensuring that the sixth form is an integral part of the school. The curriculum provision meets the needs of a wide range of interests. The school is working closely with five other schools and Tamworth College as part of the consortium to develop a wider curriculum. Teaching is good. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and take their responsibilities seriously. Standards have recently begun to rise again,

particularly in Year 12. Many pupils make good progress during their time in the sixth form.

Grade: 2

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve the accuracy and use of assessment so that teachers are clear about the pupils' current levels of attainment and what they need to learn next.
- Extend pupils' roles as active partners in their learning, and further involve parents in supporting their children to be successful learners.
- Develop accommodation and resources to support the continuing improvements in teaching.

Achievement and standards

Both the pupils' attainment and their rate of progress have improved recently. Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory and sometimes better.

Between 2000 and 2004, the school's results in the end-of-Key Stage 3 national tests were broadly average in English, mathematics and science. In 2005, the proportion of pupils who attained the nationally expected Level 5 or better increased to over 80% in mathematics and English. The improvement in mathematics was particularly good, with over 60% of pupils attaining Level 6 or better, including 5% of pupils who gained a Level 8. In science, results were slightly lower than in previous years.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have also been broadly average in recent years. In 2005, 48% of pupils gained at least five A* to C grades, which was broadly similar to the previous year, and slightly lower than the national average. The percentage of pupils, particularly boys, who failed to attain a GCSE pass rose slightly in 2005. Girls attained more high-grade passes than boys.

In the sixth form, results at AS Level improved in around two thirds of subjects in 2005 compared to the previous few years. At A Level, results were similar to the previous year. Sixth form pupils taking examinations at all levels are on track to meet appropriate targets in 2006.

At the time of the last inspection, pupils' progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 had been adversely affected by too much inadequate teaching and sometimes by poor attitudes and behaviour. Progress was particularly weak in English at Key Stage 3 and mathematics at Key Stage 4. The considerable improvements which have occurred in the school since then have had a significant impact. Progress in lessons is satisfactory and often better, and the school's data accurately reflects an increasing proportion of the pupils whose achievement is good. Pupils at both key

stages are on track to meet suitably challenging targets in 2006.

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, with many opportunities to explore different ways of life through assemblies, regularly produced by the pupils, and a range of curriculum areas. Pupils enjoy being in school and feel safe, which is demonstrated by their good attendance. Standards of behaviour are now good. The consistent implementation of the behaviour policy results in an ethos conducive to learning. Pupils are smartly dressed, polite and helpful. They treat staff and one another with respect. There is little evidence of litter or graffiti and the atmosphere in the school is relaxed and orderly. This term there have been virtually no exclusions, which exemplifies the improvements in behaviour as well as the school's strong commitment to keeping exclusion to a minimum. There are many opportunities for the pupils to exercise responsibility, to which they respond positively. The pupils conduct themselves safely and are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

An exciting range of well attended cultural, academic and sporting enrichment activities takes place throughout the school day. The school council gives the elected student members the chance to put ideas forward, all of which are listened to and many acted on, such as the new picnic benches. Provision for music has a high profile in the school and students frequently contribute to local events such as playing at the recent Remembrance Service at the Arboretum and accompanying the turning on of the Lichfield Christmas lights. Pupils take the initiative for fund raising and enjoy being able to suggest how the money is spent. Older pupils take their roles as mentors for younger pupils very seriously and help them with their reading and personal problems. The older pupils enhance their understanding of economic well-being through work experience, business studies, Young Enterprise, the citizenship programme and careers work.

Grade: 2

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Teaching is satisfactory overall and a growing proportion of it is consistently good. Over the past eighteen months the quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly. The school is monitoring the quality of its provision rigorously and taking appropriate action to raise standards. The development of assessment for

learning is having a positive impact, as is the development of a clear lesson observation form. The school has made significant progress in identifying good practice and establishing common expectations for the quality of lessons, and has developed strategies for sharing good practice across the school.

The quality of the pupils' learning continues to be closely related to the quality of teaching. The school has rightly focused on three-part lesson, planning which is now followed by all staff. The most effective teaching made good use of starter activities, making aims and objectives clear to the pupils, and used whole-class sessions at the end of each lesson to review and check learning. Pupils made the most progress when teaching made skilful use of questioning to deepen and challenge their views, broadening their knowledge and consistently testing their understanding.

The school has worked hard to ensure teachers respond to individual needs through a structured approach. Sufficient attention is paid to the development of pupils' literacy skills. Where assessment is well used, pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to further improve. However, the school is aware that assessment is an area which still needs to be developed further. With all the recent improvements, teaching is now poised to be consistently good.

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum provision has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now good. The school has worked hard to ensure that it is flexible enough to respond to individual needs. The recent re-organisation of Year 7, for example, into six carefully selected groups enables all pupils to make good progress from different starting points. This re-organisation has begun to help the more able pupils to work at more accelerated pace. Provision is particularly well thought out for a small group of pupils with specific social and emotional needs. The needs of some pupils in Years 10 and 11 are well met by providing a range of part-time college courses, including stone masonry, hairdressing and motor mechanics. A recent addition to the curriculum is an enrichment programme for the gifted and talented. The well-planned 'Learning to Learn' days have been valued by pupils.

Resources for learning, particularly information communication technology (ICT), have significantly improved since the previous inspection. All teachers and all sixth form students have lap-top computers which are used on a regular basis.

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support

Provision for pupils' care, guidance and support is good. All the required procedures for child protection are in place. Risk assessment and health and safety checks are carefully attended to in order to ensure pupils' safety at all times. The school continues to experience difficulties with narrow stairways and corridors but the risks are minimised by the staff's vigilance at changeover times. Pupils and staff are educated with regard to the problems of stress and counselling is available to anyone who needs it. Parent partnership meetings help foster good relationships with the school and surveys are used to find out pupils' and parents' views. Pupils benefit from personal, health, social and citizenship lessons, which ensure they are well informed on matters of health and safety awareness, drugs and sex education, as well as how to be a good citizen. The school works hard to ensure that it is inclusive and that all pupils receive the education that they deserve. Pupils feel their teachers and other staff care about them and are approachable should they have any problems with work or personal issues. Year 9 pupils receive helpful advice about the choice of courses in Year 11 and a wide-ranging careers programme makes pupils aware of the educational and career options available to them post-16. The school works closely with a variety of agencies to promote pupils' well-being. Effective induction arrangements help the transition from primary school and into the sixth form run smoothly so that pupils make a very positive start in their new phase of school life.

Grade: 2

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's dynamic and incisive leadership has led to rapid improvement. His drive, commitment and energy have enthused and reinvigorated the staff, who have responded well to the challenges of improving the school. He has built a cohesive and focused senior team, who understand their pivotal roles in the school's continuing development and are working effectively to fulfil them. Pupils spoke warmly about the difference which the headteacher has made to the school, and the important role played by the senior staff. Older pupils in particular were keen to emphasise the many improvements which have been made over the last eighteen months.

The headteacher has given careful thought to building capacity and has taken a series of appropriate actions to do so. Middle managers have been made much more accountable. They have responded well to good opportunities to develop their skills, and are becoming increasingly influential. Self-evaluation is thorough and indicates that the senior team has a very clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They understand the need to eradicate the remaining pockets of underachievement and the ways in which this can be achieved. Rigorous actions have led to significant improvements in teaching, behaviour, assessment and

tracking and accommodation over the past eighteen months.

The governing body is providing the school with a good level of support, coupled with appropriate challenge. The chair of the governing body is committed to his role and provides good leadership. A continuing training programme has given the governors a valuable opportunity to become fully involved in the school's improvement planning. Governors are now well placed to become more involved in discussions about standards and progress.

The local authority's support for the school has been good. The school has particularly valued the commitment shown by its link adviser.

Grade: 2

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
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	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	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

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	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

The Pupils c/o the School Council Nether Stowe High School St Chad's Road Lichfield W513 7NB

7 December 2005

Dear Pupils

As you know, your school was placed in Special Measures in January 2004, because at that time it was not providing a good enough education. Since the autumn term 2004 I have been visiting your school every term to monitor its progress. Each term I have seen the many improvements which have been made, and I know that Mr Cooper has shared the feedback from these visits with you. As you will know by now, when we visited over the last two days we found that so much improvement has been made that the school no longer needs to be in Special Measures. Nether Stowe is now an effective school; many aspects of your school are good and are well on the way to becoming even better. I know that you have all worked very hard to get to this point, and that you will be very pleased.

Thank you to those of you who shared your views with us during this inspection, either in lessons or in one of the meetings which we held with you. You made it very clear to us that Mr Cooper has made a huge difference to the school, and that you appreciate all the improvements. You also told us that you value the part played by the senior team and the rest of the staff. You are particularly well cared for at Nether Stowe, and it is evident that you appreciate the many opportunities which you are given. Teaching has improved enormously. A significant number of your lessons are good. Behaviour and attitudes to learning are much, much better! Pupils are far more focused on learning. As a result of these improvements the school's results are improving, particularly at Key Stage 3. The school's targets for you for 2006 are challenging (but right) and you will need to continue to work hard to reach them.

We have asked the senior team and governors to continue all their good work. In particular we have left them with three priorities:

- To continue to develop assessment so that your teachers are always clear about what you know and understand, and can therefore plan the next steps.
- To give you more responsibility for your own learning (for example, by ensuring that you know your targets and the steps that you need to improve), and to involve your parents in supporting you as much as possible.
- To continue to improve the building and the resources, as money allows (we know this is much better than it was and Mr Cooper will continue to improve things when the school can afford it).

I have always enjoyed visiting your school, but I am delighted that you no longer need me to do so. Mr Cooper and the senior team have many excellent plans to continue to improve Nether Stowe, and will need your support and best efforts to make the school even better. Congratulations on your achievements. I wish you every success in the future.

Mrs S Morris-King Her Majesty's Inspector