

Nether Stowe School

St Chad's Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 7NB

Inspection dates

31 January–1 February 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- In 2016, too many pupils did not make the progress they should from their starting points. This included disadvantaged pupils with middle and high prior attainment, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The quality of teaching is variable. Aspects of weaker teaching that limit progress include: a lack of challenge for pupils of different abilities, and the quality of questioning to check and extend learning.
- Inconsistent implementation of the school's behaviour management policy by staff at all levels means that pupils' behaviour in some lessons and their conduct around the school are not as orderly as they might be.
- Attendance, although improving for most groups, is improving too slowly.
- Leaders' evaluation of the school's overall performance is rather generous because it focuses too much on the quality of its support for individual pupils, which is good, and not enough on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of school performance are not rigorous enough. Their use and analysis of data have not been sharp enough to drive rapid improvement.
- Although the quality of middle leadership is improving, not all middle leaders have a sufficiently well-informed view of their strategic contribution to whole-school priorities.
- Outcomes for academic courses in the sixth form are weak. Leaders have not monitored the quality of provision or outcomes sufficiently to be able to take timely actions to improve the sixth form.

The school has the following strengths

- Staff in the school know every pupil and sixth-form student very well. As a result, the care for their personal development and well-being is good.
- The achievement of sixth-form students on vocational courses is very good.
- Governance of the school is strong. Governors' well-informed understanding of the school is demonstrated in the effective challenge they provide to leaders.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that they bring about more rapid improvement in the progress made by pupils overall, particularly disadvantaged pupils, by building on the very good practice that already exists in the school, focusing in particular on improving:
 - the level of challenge in lessons, so that all pupils and sixth-form students are fully engaged in learning and make the progress they should from their starting points
 - questioning, so that it is used more widely to stretch pupils and sixth-form students, and to encourage them to think more deeply and develop their oral skills
 - how consistently teachers implement the school's behaviour management policy so that the quality of learning for all pupils in all lessons is improved.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management in the school so that there is a sharper focus on ensuring that the achievement of pupils and sixth-form students improves more rapidly, by:
 - developing more rigorous approaches to monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' progress and attendance and behaviour
 - sharpening leaders' use and analysis of data about all aspects of the school's performance so that these inform strategic direction and bring about rapid improvement in teaching and learning and outcomes
 - further developing middle leaders to enable them to contribute more effectively to whole-school improvement
 - ensuring that school policies, for example in relation to behaviour management and to marking and feedback, are implemented consistently and effectively by teachers and leaders as appropriate.
- Improve the quality of the sixth form by ensuring that leadership of this area is more strategic in its approach to improvement and responds more rapidly to evidence of weakness, by ensuring that:
 - students on academic courses make the progress of which they are capable, given their starting points and ability
 - the retention rate from Year 12 to Year 13 improves
 - the provision of non-qualification activity is monitored to ensure that all students meet the 16–19 programme requirements at a high level and thus further develop their skills and attributes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Despite the strong support leaders provide, and the ambition they have for pupils and sixth-form students, their actions have not brought about sufficiently rapid improvement in outcomes.
- Leaders have a rather generous view of the overall performance of the school because it is shaded by the good quality of their support and guidance for pupils and sixth-form students. As a result, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, and underachievement by groups of pupils and sixth-form students, have not been tackled with sufficient urgency or rigour.
- Despite an over-generous self-evaluation, senior leaders are clear about what the areas for improvement are. They have taken prompt action to address shortcomings, for example in subject areas that did not perform well, and in improving staffing and the quality of teaching and learning. Measures have been put in place to improve the accuracy of assessment, including more frequent data cycles for gathering assessment information, criteria for making predictions about grades and cross-moderation with other local schools. Compulsory catch-up for pupils who achieve below targets is well supported by parents and is having a positive impact on progress.
- Leadership and management of teaching and learning lack a clear vision and plan for developing teaching and learning across the whole school. A detailed monitoring schedule is in place to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning but the system tends to prioritise compliance with policies rather than the effectiveness of teaching and its impact on learning.
- Monitoring activities are carried out regularly and result in actions for improvement across all aspects of the school. However, the use of analysis and evaluation of data about performance, particularly in relation to groups, is not always sharp enough to enable leaders to respond promptly and effectively to bring about rapid improvement. Despite this, actions are now leading to improvement in the progress that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, are making that can be sustained.
- The school allows different subject departments to determine their own marking and feedback policies. In many subjects, teachers provide pupils with feedback in line with their department's policy. However, this is not the case in all subjects. As a result, there is a wide disparity in marking frequency and depth between subjects. These inconsistencies in assessment practice affect pupils' learning and progress.
- Performance management is rigorous and holds teachers and leaders fully to account for the contribution they make to pupils' and sixth-form students' progress and to their professional responsibilities in school.

- Changes to the structure of middle leadership are ensuring that the school has the capacity to secure the improvement it needs to become a good school. Middle leaders now play a more effective role in driving improvement and in checking on the impact of teachers' work. However, there are still inconsistencies in practice and this is reflected in the outcomes and quality of teaching, learning and assessment between subjects. Not all middle leaders have a clear strategic view of the part played by their own departments or areas of responsibility in whole-school performance.
- Professional development opportunities are improving and are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching overall. Newly qualified teachers are very positive about the support they receive and its impact on their confidence in the classroom.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to achieve well. Pupils with low prior attainment and those requiring additional support with literacy and numeracy receive a curriculum that meets their needs well and this is reflected in the fact that these pupils make the progress they should. The curriculum includes a wide range of enrichment activities that cater for pupils with different needs and interests. The house system, with its emphasis on 'friendly competition', contributes to this. The strong focus on personal, social and health-related issues, including effective careers advice and guidance, means that pupils are well informed about a range of issues that enable them to keep themselves safe and to prepare for the next stage of their lives. Support for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the way in which British values are threaded through the curriculum, encourage pupils to be respectful and tolerant of others. Previously identification of shortcomings in the curriculum for pupils who attend off-site alternative provision has resulted in effective steps to improve its quality.
- Leaders' strong focus on the care and support of all pupils and sixth-form students strongly influences the values and the culture of the school. There is a real sense of community about the school and this is reflected in the positive relationships between pupils, sixth-form students and staff at all levels in the organisation. Pupil premium funding has been used well to promote relevant pupils' personal development and its focus on promoting their achievement is now improving. Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to encourage the development of literacy and mathematical skills for relevant pupils.
- The school is more outward looking, and visits to other schools and collaborations with other schools are increasing. However, this is still an area for the school to consider developing further in order to improve its own practice.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They have a range of expertise and experience that they use to support leaders and to challenge them across a range of important areas, including the use of pupil premium funding and safeguarding.
- Governors are keenly aware of the need to use the limited resources available in this small school effectively, to promote the personal well-being of pupils and sixth-form students and to improve outcomes for them.

- Governors actively communicate with parents and have regular meetings with senior and middle leaders to ensure that they are kept up to date about the issues facing the school. Governors recognise the importance of developing middle leaders to increase leadership capacity and in order to retain good teachers.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Appropriate training has been undertaken, including training in the 'Prevent' duty. Pupils and sixth-form students have been informed about this and are able to talk about the assemblies and sessions where this, and other key safeguarding issues, have been discussed.
- Staff receive effective and up-to-date training on safeguarding. Leaders treat safeguarding as a priority. It was encouraging to note that a concern raised by inspectors about access to the school site is being actively considered in meetings by leaders.
- The designated lead for safeguarding is knowledgeable and tenacious in pursuing actions in a timely and decisive manner to ensure that pupils and sixth-form students are kept safe. Procedures are meticulously followed when safeguarding allegations have been made.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching overall is variable. There is much good practice in the school but too much teaching fails to enable pupils to learn well and make the progress of which they are capable.
- Where teaching is weaker, it exhibits some of the following characteristics: planning that does not always take into account the needs of pupils' and sixth-form students' different starting points; a lack of challenge for pupils of different abilities; teachers' questioning that does not always extend or check on understanding effectively; and low-level off-task behaviour that is not always dealt with immediately by teachers.
- The very good practice in teaching that is evident in some areas of the school is not yet being shared effectively to encourage more rapid improvement in teaching overall.
- Most teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to plan interesting lessons that engage and challenge pupils and sixth-form students to learn well. Their thorough planning takes into account different starting points and, as a result, there is strong engagement of pupils. The quality of teachers' questioning prompts deeper thinking and there is a strong focus on literacy and oracy skills in lessons. Expectations about presentation in pupils' books are high and pupils engage with learning well and work hard.

- In a Year 11 mathematics lesson where the class was revising algebraic fractions, the teacher had high expectations and provided an appropriate level of challenge. The lesson was well planned and took into account the different starting point of all pupils. Pupils who were in a 'further maths' group supported other pupils. Both the teacher and the teaching assistant provided effective one-to-one interventions during the lesson. Teaching was lively and purposeful and involved almost constant monitoring and evaluation of pupils' understanding.
- Assessment is accurate and regular and is supported by the increasing use of external moderation and verification. Where pupils and sixth-form students fail to reach expected standards in assessments, compulsory catch-up work is required. This means that they are supported to redo their assessments and revisit areas that have proved difficult. This is an important strategy that is having a positive impact on the progress current pupils and sixth-form students are demonstrating in their learning.
- Teaching assistants provide strong support for lower ability pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Pupils who have autism spectrum disorder are particularly well supported by teaching assistants.
- Lower ability pupils are provided with a bespoke curriculum for English and mathematics that meets their needs very well and has a positive impact on their progress in subjects beyond English and mathematics.
- Teachers promote equality of opportunity well through their teaching, and most classrooms are highly inclusive environments where all have an opportunity to achieve and take part.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Most pupils are confident young people who are proud of their school community. They show respect for others and have positive attitudes to school, their peers and staff.
- Independent careers advice, together with school guidance, enable pupils to make appropriate choices about the next steps in their education. There are many case studies of young people who, faced with very challenging personal situations, have, with strong school support, moved on successfully to the next stage in their lives.
- The responses of parents on Parent View are highly positive. In addition, a number of parents contacted inspectors to applaud the care and support provided for their children. Pupils commented positively about how well they are cared for and how their personal development is supported.

- There is a real sense of community in this school. Values of respect and tolerance drive its culture and this promotes all aspects of welfare for individuals. As a result, all are able to flourish in terms of their own personal development. At the same time, pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe and healthy as a result of a strong personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme. Pupils say that they feel safe because the school teaches them how to be safe. For example, key stage 3 pupils appeared very knowledgeable about issues to do with e-safety.
- The special educational needs coordinator has detailed knowledge of relevant pupils and deploys teaching assistants appropriately. There is timely involvement of outside agencies to support pupils. The support for pupils who attend the autism resource centre is very good and is clearly focused on their individual needs. There is strong provision for mental health issues. The school has had its promotion of pupils' well-being celebrated in an award granted for its provision for pupils' health and well-being.
- Effective work with primary schools to ease the transition of pupils from Year 6 to Year 7 ensures that pupils settle into the school quickly and make progress.
- The effective use of tutor time is variable. For example, 'Drop Everything And Read' sessions are not as effective as they might be because pupils are not reading according to their ability. They are selecting books on the day, from a limited range, with no guidance and no monitoring of whether choices are appropriate. The impact on reading skills of this activity is therefore sometimes limited.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. Most pupils conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school. Occasionally, behaviour around the school is too boisterous and it is not always clear that staff, including senior leaders, are taking sufficiently robust and consistent actions. Although staff regularly challenge any examples of behaviour that is less than good, for example in the corridors, they do not always follow this up to ensure compliance. In lessons where teaching is weaker, off-task and occasional minor disruption occurs. Mostly, this does not affect the quality of learning by others, but very occasionally it does.
- Exclusions are falling as a result of effective actions by the school. This is the case overall and for disadvantaged pupils, for boys, and for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Bullying is a rare occurrence at this school, and if and when it does occur, it is dealt with promptly and effectively by staff. All pupils and sixth-form students inspectors met with during the inspection attested to this.
- Pupils are punctual to school and to their lessons. Attendance is improving slowly overall and for individual groups. The rate of persistent absence is falling because of the impact of appropriate rewards and follow-up work by external agencies and the school. Attendance for pupils on alternative provision is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Year 11 pupils in 2016 did not achieve in line with expectations and did not make the progress expected of them given their starting points. This was particularly the case in English and in a number of non-core subjects. It was the case for middle- and high-ability pupils, including disadvantaged pupils with middle and high prior attainment, and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Action has been taken to improve progress, including ensuring appropriate staffing in subjects where this was previously problematic, such as for English. Moves to improve the quality of teaching and learning and leadership in some subject areas have also been made. As a result, the progress being made by current pupils at both key stage 3 and key stage 4, including across most groups of pupils, is now improving.
- In addition, a significant amount of additional support is now in place for disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 in English and mathematics to ensure that current pupils make the progress they should from their starting points. This is supported by a local-authority-wide project about the use of pupil premium funding. This is already having a positive impact on progress and attitudes and the support is planned to be provided for disadvantaged pupils in all years.
- Numeracy and literacy lessons are provided in Years 7 and 8 for the least able pupils to practise, consolidate and develop skills. This provision is particularly effective in literacy where phonics teaching is embedded. As a result, pupils have made effective progress in their reading and writing, and reading ages have improved. Numeracy catch-up activities are improving their arithmetical skills. This support has also improved their performance in subjects beyond English and mathematics and has had a positive impact on their attitudes to learning.
- Lower ability pupils in all groups, including lower ability disadvantaged pupils and lower ability pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve in line with expectations as a result of effective school support that targets their individual needs well. This reflects the strong support the school provides for pupils who join the school with low levels of literacy and numeracy.
- The good support that pupils who have autism spectrum disorder receive enables them to achieve well, given their individual needs and circumstances. The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision away from the school site make appropriate progress in line with their starting points.
- The destination data about Year 11 pupils indicates that the qualifications they gain and their personal development while at school enable them to successfully access the next stage of their education.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Students' progress and attainment in academic subjects are not as good as they should be given their starting points. The value added to students' achievements by these courses has been falling over recent years. This compares with the progress and attainment for those students taking vocational courses, which are very good.

- Relative strengths and weaknesses in relation to teaching and learning are similar to those in the main school. Much teaching has a very positive impact on students' learning and progress. For example, in a Year 13 English lesson, the teacher had very high expectations of students. She provided challenging learning activities that stretched students' knowledge and understanding and required them to think deeply, question each other well, and provide extended and complex responses. As in the main school, this high quality is not used sufficiently to spread good practice and ensure that teaching overall and its impact on learning are consistently good.
- There are many opportunities available for students to develop skills and attributes beyond the classroom, including work experience, mentoring of younger pupils, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, and Young Enterprise and Young Engineer projects. However, not all students participate and individualised study programmes are not well planned or monitored by leaders. As a result, not all students gain the potential skills and attributes they might if monitoring were routine and implemented rigorously.
- Students who join the sixth form without at least a grade C at GCSE in English and mathematics undertake appropriate additional study and, particularly in English, most gain a grade C. They are not as successful in mathematics.
- Independent careers advice and the guidance provided by the school about the next steps, whether to higher education or into employment and apprenticeships, are effective and all students move on to appropriate next-step destinations. As in the main schools, there is a strong provision to support pupils' and sixth-form students' mental health.
- There is a robust system for keeping students safe while also giving them the freedom expected by sixth-form students. They are strong ambassadors for the school. They are loyal, thoughtful young people and very good role models for younger pupils in the school.
- A range of actions to improve provision has been introduced. This includes more support and supervised study, particularly for those who are underachieving against their target grades, and more input on the development of study skills.
- Sixth-form leaders have not acted rapidly enough to pick up the deteriorating added value in relation to students' achievement on academic courses and to do something about it. Leaders have not monitored performance at a strategic level well enough in relation to attendance, outcomes, retention rates and curriculum take-up of non-qualification provision.

School details

Unique reference number	124409
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10025350

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	601
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Rod Clark
Headteacher	Ruth Poppleton
Telephone number	01543 263446
Website	www.netherstowe.com
Email address	rpoppleton@netherstowe.com
Date of previous inspection	5–6 March 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils and sixth-form students are White British and speak English as their first language.

- The number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- The school has a specialist autism resource unit that caters for seven pupils.
- Seven pupils are educated off site at the Bridge Short Stay School in Lichfield.
- The school is a member of the Sutton Park Teaching School Alliance, which supports the school's training and development of newly qualified teachers.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious incident that occurred at the setting since the previous inspection is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident(s) were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Information about this inspection

- Parts of 34 lessons were observed, including some that were observed during joint learning walks with senior leaders. In addition, two assemblies were observed plus a number of tutor periods.
- Inspectors observed behaviour in and around school, and during lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, teachers, pupils, sixth-form students and governors. A phone discussion with a local authority representative was held.
- Inspectors reviewed school documents, including self-evaluation documents, school improvement plans, external reviews of performance, minutes of governing body meetings, data about progress, attendance and behaviour, and about the monitoring of teaching and learning.
- The 49 responses on Parent View were reviewed. In addition, the 12 responses from pupils and sixth-form students and the 39 responses from staff to Ofsted's online questionnaire were reviewed.

Inspection team

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Derek Barnes	Ofsted Inspector
David Buckle	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Nicola Walters	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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