

Sneyd Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104252
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	324004
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Joyce HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of students	11–18
Gender of students	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	900
Sixth form	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John De-Hayes
Headteacher	Sean Sweeney
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 November 2006
School address	Vernon Way Sneyd Lane Bloxwich Walsall WS3 2PA
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Sneyd Community School is a specialist mathematics and computing college. It serves a catchment area near the northern boundary of Walsall consisting of several wards where the socio-economic backgrounds of students are less favourable than average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well above average. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds and almost all speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is similar to the national figure, as is the proportion identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. An interim headteacher has been in post since November 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The overall effectiveness of this school is inadequate. In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the level of students' achievement throughout the school; the quality of teaching and learning. The school sixth form also requires significant improvement.

Following the last inspection, the school experienced a period of significant decline and now fails to provide a satisfactory standard of education. Many students do not make the progress expected from their starting points, and a very high proportion of students significantly underachieve. Standards are exceptionally low. Inadequate progress is adversely affecting the development of skills that will contribute to students' future economic well-being.

More recently, following significant external support and the appointment of an interim headteacher, together with the strengthening of other management roles, many areas of concern are starting to be addressed. Leadership and management are satisfactory and give the school the capacity to improve. Standards are starting to rise, although the rate of improvement is not even across the school and despite these recent improvements, many aspects of the school's performance remain inadequate.

The school provides a pleasant and safe environment for students, with many good resources. Students move around the school in a calm and orderly manner and the school has worked hard to improve students' attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Whilst attendance levels remain below average, they have significantly improved as a result of the school's efforts. Behaviour, both around the school and in lessons, is satisfactory overall and the revised arrangements for providing rewards and sanctions are starting to engage students and improve their attitudes to learning. The school has been particularly successful in working with parents and carers and communication has much improved. The majority of parents and carers who returned inspection questionnaires commented very favourably about the recent improvements made.

The quality of teaching is improving and the number of inadequate lessons has reduced. However, too many lessons remain inadequate and too few are good or better. The school's specialist status has not yet had an impact on raising standards across the curriculum. Typically, teaching does not meet the full range of students' needs and teachers do not take sufficient account of students' individual learning styles or ability levels when planning lessons. Managers have started to monitor more effectively the quality of teaching and learning, and best practice is now being shared. The marking of students' work, although improving in some subjects, does not always provide clear advice and guidance on what students need to do to improve.

The curriculum is now satisfactory and positive changes have ensured that the range of courses and accreditation offered better meet the needs and interests of the students. However, as recognised by the school, some aspects of the personal, social and health education programme are not as effective as they should be. Despite this, students' personal development is satisfactory overall. They do contribute effectively to the school and the local community, and links with community organisations are improving. Most students are aware of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and this is promoted satisfactorily by the school. Students report that they do enjoy aspects of their education and were keen to tell inspectors that 'things are getting better'.

Pastoral care, guidance and support provided by school staff and external agencies are satisfactory. Students have access to a range of specialist services and value the support provided. Incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively and students are confident that they can speak to staff about any concerns or problems that they have. However, academic guidance and support are inadequate as attainment and progress data are only just starting to be systematically collected and used effectively in teachers' planning.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is inadequate. Despite improvements during the last year, many students do not reach high enough standards. There is considerable variation in the performance of different subjects. Whilst many lessons are engaging and involve students in learning, too many fail to provide enough challenge. Students' personal development is satisfactory and many make a positive contribution to both the school and wider community. Students appreciate the guidance and support provided by tutors, which are satisfactory. They comment very favourably about the support provided in relation to making university applications. The curriculum is satisfactory, with the range of course options enhanced by the joint arrangements with another local school. Leadership and management are satisfactory but improvement actions are only just beginning to have a positive impact on raising standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teaching is planned to meet the needs of the differing ability levels and learning styles of individual students.
- Provide clear advice and guidance to students on what they need to do to improve and progress to the next level or grade in every subject.
- Enhance, embed and rigorously monitor arrangements for collecting and using attainment and progress data to ensure students achieve to their full potential.
- Ensure the rate of improvement is more even across all aspects of the school's work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement and standards are inadequate throughout the school. The majority of students enter the school in Year 7 with levels of prior attainment similar to those

found nationally, although overall, the current Year 11 had prior attainment levels that were below average when they entered the school. Due to students making insufficient progress during both Key Stages 3 and 4, attainment levels at the end of Years 9 and Year 11 are exceptionally low. Students' achievement in the sixth form is inadequate.

The 2008 school performance data show that the proportion of students achieving five or more high grade passes in GCSE examinations was well below the national average. The proportion achieving this level including English and mathematics improved when compared to 2007, but results remains very low indeed. The school failed to achieve the majority of the targets that were set in relation to students' achievement, including the attainment targets for the school's specialist subjects. There is no significant difference in the attainment levels of different groups within the school such as those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although girls achieve better than boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most students are polite and well mannered, although during the inspection a significant number of students identified with behavioural issues were absent from the school site, attending a course. Attendance has improved significantly in response to the school's evolving monitoring systems and the positive changes made to the curriculum. Students speak positively about the recent changes and most report that they are starting to enjoy school more as a result.

The range of opportunities for students to engage in sporting activities helps many to develop healthier lifestyles, and most understand the need to eat healthily and take regular exercise. However, despite this, lunch for many students consists of food and drink with high sugar content. Students make a satisfactory contribution to the community through, for example, a variety of fundraising initiatives for local organisations and through a developing 'student voice' which involves them in the running of their school. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Work is not always well matched to students' individual needs, learning styles or ability levels. Consequently, many students do not make sufficient progress or achieve high enough standards. In some lessons, usually where teaching is least effective, students lose interest and low-level disruption further slows the pace of learning. Whilst most teachers have good relationships with their students and lesson planning follows a common format, teachers do not always make clear to students exactly what they are expected to learn.

The school is now appropriately monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and is aware of where the weaker teaching lies. External support and more stable

staffing have improved the quality of teaching in mathematics. Staff absence has reduced and cover arrangements have improved to provide much-needed consistency in teaching. However, the quality of teaching in science remains a serious concern and, more generally, teaching does not yet sufficiently engage, motivate or challenge students so they fulfil their potential.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

An alternative curriculum with greater opportunities for work experience and vocational education is helping to improve attendance and reduce exclusions. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is improving and recent work has helped to boost achievement in literacy, particularly at Key Stage 3. The school is starting to improve provision for gifted and talented students but this is at an early stage of development. Links between subjects are just starting to develop and the 'City Project' represents a successful collaboration between the mathematics and technology departments. However, overall there is little evidence to show that the specialist subjects are being used to raise standards across the curriculum.

The school has correctly identified weaknesses in the provision for personal, social and health education. Although students' personal development is satisfactory overall, these weaknesses have resulted in education in sex, relationships and careers not being delivered as effectively as it should be. The school is taking appropriate action to address the shortcomings of this provision. The range of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory and includes many extra sessions designed to improve students' progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Serious weaknesses in academic guidance and support inhibit students' progress. Whilst recent initiatives put in place by the school's leadership team are starting to tackle underachievement, too many students are unclear about whether they are working at their target level or grade, and many do not know what they need to do to improve. Academic performance data are not used sufficiently well by teachers to provide guidance and support to ensure students reach their full potential. The guidance and support students receive through the programme of careers education in the main school is inconsistent and, as a result, many students are unsure of what they need to do in order to fulfil their aspirations.

Pastoral care is satisfactory. Induction arrangements allow students to settle quickly into their new school. Positive relationships are quickly formed between teachers and students, resulting in students feeling safe and confident that there is always someone to whom they can turn if they have a problem. Arrangements for safeguarding students are robust, and child protection procedures meet statutory requirements. There are effective links with welfare and other external agencies to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

There is a shared understanding of the need for rapid and sustained improvements and for appropriately challenging targets to be used. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements have improved and the school's self-evaluation is accurate in identifying both areas of strength and priorities for improvement. The role of middle managers, particularly at subject leader level, has been successfully developed and there are clear lines of accountability. However, the rate of improvement and the quality of leadership still varies too much between subjects.

Following recent training, governors are now more aware of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and are more able to both support the school and to provide challenge. Whilst the school is appropriately managing a reduction in staffing levels because of falling student numbers and is starting to raise standards, the current performance of the school reflects poor value for money. The promotion of community cohesion is satisfactory overall, although students' awareness of different cultures and the workings of the wider world are not as well developed as their awareness of their immediate community.

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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?	4	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

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?	4	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Annex B



14 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Sneyd Community School, Walsall WS3 2PA

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the outcome of the inspection. Before I do, I would like to thank you all for your help during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and your comments helped us form our judgements about the school.

We were pleased to hear that you thought the school was a safe and friendly place with many good facilities, especially for sports. We were also pleased to hear that many of you thought the school was improving and, as a result, you were enjoying more of the work and activities that you do.

Whilst we also found that the school is improving, we established that at present the school does not provide you with a satisfactory standard of education. Many of you are not sufficiently challenged in your lessons and most of you could make better progress and achieve higher standards if the work you were set was better matched to your individual ability levels and learning styles. We found that information about your prior achievements is not used effectively to plan your learning or to help you progress.

We did identify that positive changes to the curriculum and effective pastoral support are helping you to develop as young citizens, and that your attendance is improving. However, despite these and the other improvements being made, and as recognised by the school, further improvement is still required. We have therefore issued the school with a 'Notice to Improve' and have identified four key areas where improvement is needed. These are:

- to ensure teaching is planned to meet your individual ability levels and learning styles in every lesson
- to provide you with clear advice and guidance so you know what needs to be done to improve to the next level or grade in every subject
- to use your prior attainment information to set you challenging targets and to monitor your progress against those targets
- to ensure the rate of improvement is more even across all aspects of the school's work.

You can help the school by continuing to concentrate and to work hard in all of your lessons. We wish you well in the future.

Yours faithfully

Paul Joyce
Her Majesty's Inspector