



Light Hall School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 104112
 Local Authority Solihull
 Inspection number 286859
 Inspection dates 6-7 December 2006
 Reporting inspector Elaine Taylor HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Hathaway Road
School category	Community		Shirley
Age range of students	11-16		Solihull
			West Midlands
			B90 2PZ
Gender of students	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 7443835
Number on roll (school)	1240	Fax number	0121 7336148
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs J Ulliott
		Headteacher	Mr V Scutt
Date of previous school inspection	1-5 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection date(s)	Inspection no.
11-16	6-7 December 2006	286859

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Light Hall School is larger than average. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The majority of students are of White British heritage and very few students do not have English as their first language. There are fewer than average students with statements. In September 2003 the school became a specialist college for Mathematics and Computing. It also has achieved Investors in People and Artsmark silver status, and is preparing to become an extended school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school **Grade: 3**

This is a satisfactory but improving school with many good features. The majority of parents are very supportive and speak highly of the headteacher and the positive ethos which can be felt around the school. The students praise the opportunities the school gives them to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and speak highly of the support they receive to help them feel safe.

Academic standards in GCSE examinations are high in mathematics and English and this prepares students well for their future working life. The progress students make is satisfactory, because it slows down during Key Stage 3. The majority of students achieve the above average standards that would be expected of them by the time they reach Year 11, but more able students could be doing better, as could boys.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. No lessons seen during the inspection were unsatisfactory and inspectors saw some good and a small proportion of outstanding lessons. The school has incorporated students' views on what makes a good lesson into its teaching policy. In lessons students make at least satisfactory progress and in some the progress is good because teachers employ a range of effective strategies to engage and challenge their students. In these lessons their enjoyment is evident. However, teachers do not yet use the information gathered on students' progress consistently well in planning lessons or setting individual targets to ensure that all groups of students are challenged to do as well as they can.

Students are friendly and mature, and the majority behave well in lessons and around the school. Incidents are dealt with consistently and the sanctions imposed ensure that few persist with inappropriate behaviour. Students form good relationships with adults and the school provides excellent support for students with difficulties in the student support centre. They attend regularly and display very mature attitudes, particularly as members of the school council who regularly attend meetings with governors.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been some clear improvements since the last inspection in 2001 especially in the provision for students with special educational needs. They have a good overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses, but their monitoring procedures are not rigorous enough as they do not focus sufficiently on the impact of the school's work on the progress of the students. Much has been put in place to address this, but new systems have not yet had time to make an impact. Nevertheless inspectors feel that the school has a good capacity to improve.

There is a real sense of team spirit and this was particularly evident in the way the whole school community responded to the challenges faced following the

serious fire which destroyed a large part of the school buildings in February 2006. Parents were full of praise for the way the school ensured continuity of learning in such difficult circumstances.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make certain that self-evaluation processes at all levels have sufficient rigour to ensure that they lead to all students making good progress.
- Develop the academic monitoring of students' progress.
- Spread the best practice in teaching across all areas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

When taking into account their attainment on entry to the school, inspectors judge that overall academic progress and achievement are satisfactory, but on a rising trend due to the current improving quality of teaching and closer monitoring of individual progress. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average, but weaker progress at Key Stage 3 in particular makes achievement only satisfactory. In the 2006 national tests, the school reached its targets at Key Stage 4 but did not reach those it set for itself in English and science at Key Stage 3.

Those with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress as a result of the good support they receive. More able students do not make such good progress and the school rightly recognizes the need to raise the achievement of this group. Intervention strategies put in place to improve the achievement of boys have been effective and the gap between their achievement and that of the girls has lessened considerably.

In GCSE examinations, results are above average. The proportion of students gaining 5 A*-C grades in 2006 was well above the national average and a further improvement on the good result in 2005. The number of students gaining a qualification in mathematics and English was also above average showing how well the school prepares the students for future economic success. Performance in mathematics was particularly strong and the challenging targets set as a result of it being one of the school's specialist subjects were met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. By the time they reach their final year in school, most have become mature, thoughtful individuals with the capacity to be useful and industrious citizens. Their spiritual development is satisfactory, though not as strong as their moral, social and cultural development, which is good. A recent questionnaire to students showed

they feel safe in school. The majority behave with consideration towards others, though a few are over-boisterous when moving between lessons. The school has a zero-tolerance approach to serious misdemeanours, which promotes students' safety but leads to a high number of temporary exclusions. Most students attend school regularly and enjoy their lessons. Their attitude to work is positive. They learn how to live healthy lives and are beginning to make healthy choices of food for lunch. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities which help to develop the students' good social skills, though it is not clear exactly how many students are involved as the school does not monitor this. Students believe their school takes their views seriously. Through the school council students offer sensible suggestions for change, for example through helpful recommendations for improvements in sex education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. All lessons have clear learning objectives although the quality of lesson planning varies between subjects. Where good or outstanding teaching occurs it is characterised by the use of challenging questions, activities which call for independent and collaborative working, a brisk pace and the tight use of time in order to concentrate thinking. During these lessons the students demonstrate a clear interest in the subject and the teachers actively engage students in assessing their own learning. Not all teaching matches up to this quality. In lessons where students' progress was only satisfactory it was because teachers allowed students to be passive. Such lessons were calm but proceeded at too slow a pace. Excitement, urgency and the enjoyment provided by demanding challenges were not there.

Working relationships in lessons are good throughout the school and any minor disruption is dealt with quickly and effectively. The school has provided a suitable range of in-service training to meet identified needs and some systems are in place to enable teachers to share good practice. Support for students with disabilities and learning difficulties is good and based on good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. As a result these students make good progress. Students who are identified as gifted and talented are suitably challenged in those subjects where the timetable allows groups to be organised according to their ability.

The use of assessment data is variable. Where it is good teachers match their planning and teaching to students' specific learning needs. Some teachers also set challenging short term goals and carefully track progress towards them. However, this practice is not consistent across all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Where possible the school groups students according to their needs and offers choices to meet their aspirations. Students told the inspectors that they enjoy the variety of subjects they study. In 2006 a group of more able Year 10 students took their GCSE examinations early and were thus able to start AS level studies. The curriculum is broad and balanced in all years and meets all statutory requirements. The school's decision to pursue specialist status in mathematics and computing reflects a direct response to local employment trends and anticipated skill shortages. Specialist status has enhanced in-school and community provision in a number of areas.

Options arrangements work well. Students appreciate the wide choice of courses available to them. The school is offering an increasing number of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 but planned developments in enterprise education and work-related learning have been delayed. There is an alternative curriculum for a small number of students for whom a full diet of GCSE examinations is not appropriate and the school is working to refine its arrangements to allow for differentiated pathways at Key Stage 4.

There are numerous and varied opportunities for enrichment. The school also uses time after school to provide extended curriculum opportunities at Key Stage 3 such as a second modern foreign language, GCSE Art and physical education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, support and guidance is good. Students know who to turn to if there is a concern and feel safe and secure in school. Those with learning difficulties or disabilities are given effective and increasingly improving support. These students have individual learning plans that identify clear targets to ensure their good progress. Resources and support staff are deployed effectively to meet their needs. Students experiencing behavioural difficulties in the mainstream curriculum are individually supported and re-integrated through an exemplary Pastoral Support Centre.

The arrangements to secure the health, safety and protection of all students are good with all necessary procedures in place. The school is very watchful of the care and progress of vulnerable children. Child protection procedures are rigorous and record keeping efficient. Liaison with outside agencies is good. The well managed team of form tutors and heads of year ensures that guidance and support have a big impact on the personal development of most students. Rigorous systems identify students who are absent, late, or misbehave.

The quality of academic guidance is satisfactory. A system for monitoring academic progress involving heads of year has recently been devised, but at present the information collected on students' progress is not always used well enough to give all groups of students challenging targets so that they all make good progress. The school rightly sees this as a priority for development.

Careers guidance is satisfactory and enables most students to make informed choices about subjects to study in the next stage of their education and good links with primary schools help Year 7 students to settle in quickly.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and the senior team are well respected in the school and in the wider community. They work well as a team and have begun to challenge subject leaders more effectively. Departmental monitoring is now shared between the headteacher and his senior team, making them well placed to continue this positive trend. Processes for gathering information are now established but the school has not yet brought them together to sharpen the diagnosis of what is needed. The school does not involve subject leaders routinely in evaluating the quality of teaching in their departments and correctly recognises the need to develop greater consistency in their effectiveness. As a result, recent developments have yet to have a consistent impact on students' achievement. The lack of clear focus on the impact of what the school provides on students' progress also helps to explain why the school judges its overall effectiveness and its performance in key areas such as achievement, teaching and learning, and the curriculum more generously than the inspection team.

Much work has been done to ensure that the school operates in an inclusive fashion, although not all learners yet achieve as well as they can. The school's specialist status has ensured that good links are in place with external agencies, with parents and with the local community. Governors provide the school with support but not enough challenge. They understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school but do not routinely gather first hand information about subject performance for example through formal links with departments

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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	2
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No



8 December 2006

Dear Students

Light Hall School, Hathaway Road, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands B90 2PZ

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we have made about your school.

We found that your school is satisfactory but improving, with many good features.

For instance:

- The high standards many of you achieve in your GCSE examinations.
- The wide range of opportunities to take part in activities after school.
- The range of subjects you can study and the way the school gives you choices on which subjects you want to take in Years 10 and 11.
- The high quality of some of the teaching.
- Your very good attendance and the good relationships you form with adults in the school and with each other.
- The way the school helps you if you have any difficulties.
- The contribution you make through the school council to improvements in the school.

We think that your school can improve further by making sure you benefit from more lessons which are as good as the best. We have also asked the school leaders to keep an even tighter check on how well all of you are doing. We then want your teachers to help you to improve your work by setting you challenging targets and then checking regularly to see if you are progressing well towards them. The school could also make sure that you make as much progress in the first three years in the school as you do in the last two. You could try to work harder in that time and help them to achieve that goal.

Thank you for your help in the inspection, for welcoming us into your school and talking to us so sensibly about the things you like and what you would like to see improved.

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector