

# Willowfield Humanities College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	103100
<b>Local authority</b>	Waltham Forest
<b>Inspection number</b>	376820
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 January 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Patricia Metham HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	594
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Elizabeth Rutherford
<b>Headteacher</b>	John Hemingway
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	7 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	Clifton Avenue Walthamstow London E17 6HL
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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
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## Introduction

Inspection team

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector

Anthony Byrne

Additional Inspector

Karen Thomas

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 27 lessons, observed 27 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. They evaluated students' attainment over three years, discussed examples of work with selected students, and reviewed schemes of work, policies, the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. They considered 111 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers, 100 responses to the students' questionnaire and 40 responses from staff.

## Information about the school

The school is smaller than average, with more boys than girls. For three years, government floor standards have been met for the percentage gaining five C grades or above at GCSE or equivalent, including English and mathematics.

The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is twice the national average. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is four times the national average, with nearly six in every ten having English as an additional language. The proportion of students on the School Action Plus programme, or with a statement of special educational needs, is over three times the national average. Predominantly, these students have behavioural, emotional and social issues or moderate learning difficulties. A higher than average proportion of students joins or leaves the college partway through secondary education.

Willowfield has specialist status for humanities and English and was re-designated as a training school in 2010. It contributes to postgraduate and professional development programmes and provides training for staff in the borough. It leads on provision for gifted and talented pupils in a Leading Edge partnership. Amongst its awards are the Silver Artsmark, the Careers Quality Mark, International Schools' Award and Quality in Study Support.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. Most striking is the culture of mutual respect and support amongst its exceptionally diverse community. As a Year 11 student remarked, 'Because it's multicultural, everyone accepts everyone. There's no tension.' This provides a strong foundation for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Students enter with low prior attainment and make good progress, attaining average results at GCSE and equivalent. Success in vocational subjects contributes to the upward trend. Students known to be eligible for free school meals or with special educational needs and/or disabilities do better than similar students nationally and the gap between them and their school contemporaries is closing steadily. Girls outperform boys, particularly in academic subjects.
- Sharply focused and energetically managed professional development is disseminating best practice in teaching across departments. Teaching is good overall. However, information about students' current knowledge and skills is not used consistently to update planning and set priorities for each lesson and, on occasion, teachers do not allow students time to complete tasks without interruption.
- Students, parents and carers are rightly confident that the college is a safe environment. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and staff well trained. Whilst a minority of parents and carers feels that behaviour is not always good, behaviour observed in and out of lessons was companionable and considerate. The number of fixed-term exclusions, while relatively high, has dropped in response to well-managed interventions. The school recognises this as a continuing priority.
- Leaders and managers at all levels share a commitment to inclusiveness and good citizenship. This underpins the curriculum, which has an academic core complemented by sufficient choice to support most needs. Almost all students progress to further education or training. Partnerships with schools and colleges and involvement in community projects valuably extend students' options and develop their confidence and sense of social responsibility.

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

- Establish consistency of good practice in lesson planning and teaching by:
  - making effective use of up-to-date information about students' knowledge and skills when planning lessons and, when teaching, regularly adapting plans to meet students' emerging needs and varied learning styles
  - ensuring that teachers allow students sufficient uninterrupted time to complete tasks and work independently.
- Accelerate the downward trend in fixed-term exclusions by developing further on-site strategies to support potentially vulnerable and disaffected students.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

A steady rise over three years in the proportion of students gaining five or more A\*-C grades or equivalent has brought attainment into line with national averages. Attainment is broadly average overall. Girls outperform boys, especially in language-based subjects, but, through choice of topic and greater scope for active learning, the college is closing this gap. In the majority of the lessons observed, students from all groups made good progress. Careful monitoring of progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and of those still in the early stages of English acquisition leads to well-targeted interventions, such as small-group and one-to-one teaching. This is narrowing the gap in attainment between these students and their school contemporaries. A group of three students in Year 9, for example, was observed working confidently on elements of the English curriculum that had presented particular challenge. Scrutiny of students' work showed most making evident progress, with work becoming more substantial and well structured over time, although students' technical accuracy and range of expression remain uneven. Attention to literacy skills is evident across the curriculum; for example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson, students were constructing A-grade questions and great emphasis was placed on precise use of language. Science is a particular strength, partly because the department provides a variety of courses to meet most needs and partly because it promotes active learning successfully. Asked what best supported his learning, a Year 9 student spoke for many, 'Practicals – then I can understand.' Almost all the parents and carers responding to the inspection questionnaire were confident that the college successfully helped them to support their children's learning.

### Quality of teaching

There are examples of good practice across the curriculum. Strengths include: secure and enthusiastically communicated subject knowledge; high expectations; a positive rapport with students; confident use of varied resources, including information and communication technology; productive questioning skills; varied approaches that keep students engaged and challenged; and marking that combines encouragement

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with specific guidance on how to improve. On occasion, teachers introduce a competitive element that heightens motivation, displaces inhibitions and encourages independent thinking and risk taking. This was demonstrated well in a Year 7 science lesson on different sources of renewable energy that culminated in groups presenting competing claims based on information they had gathered during the session. In discussion, Year 8 students spoke enthusiastically about learning through role play, practical investigations and group work. In less effective lessons: opportunities for active learning are not always exploited well; teachers do not make best use of the detailed information available about students' individual levels and needs; and students' concentration during independent study or group work is ruffled by teachers' continuing commentary or instructions.

All groups study an academic core, which includes history and/or geography. Students' progress from low attainment on entry to results at GCSE and BTEC that are in line with national averages. This reflects effective teaching across the ability range, with a greater focus on active learning now improving boys' progress. Well-planned literacy and numeracy lessons in Year 7 for all groups make an effective contribution to students' transition into Key Stage 3 and help to build confidence and develop basic skills. A response to the inspection questionnaire for parents and carers sums up the views of many; 'We feel that many of the teachers have extensive skills in building children's self-esteem.'

At every stage, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted both in and out of the classroom: explicitly – for example, through discussion by a Year 9 history class of the principles and practicalities underlying attitudes to desertion in the First World War – and implicitly, through the example set by teachers and support staff. Citizenship themes are clearly threaded through schemes of work for all subjects and are brought together each summer term during a week in which mixed-age groups work on cross-curricular and practical projects, such as designing resources for pupils in a nearby special school. Through such activities, Willowfield links the in-college and community elements of its humanities specialism.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students are emphatic that they feel safe. They have a clear understanding of their role in tackling the various forms of bullying and are confident that, should a problem arise, it will be dealt with quickly and well. In lessons, such as science, sport and design and technology, they show that they are aware of potential risks and they behave responsibly. Although responses to the inspection questionnaires for students and for parents and carers raised some concern about disruptive behaviour, this was not supported by behaviour observed during the inspection or by the profile presented by external surveys conducted in recent years. In this extremely diverse community, students and staff treat each other with respect; differences are accepted as a matter of course and examples of discrimination are very rare. The number of fixed-term exclusions has recently decreased sharply, especially for students with a statement of special educational needs. The college has established

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well-directed strategies to improve the behaviour of students recognised to be at risk of exclusion; for example, intervention groups focus on raising self-esteem, on anger management and on improving social skills. Extending the range of alternatives to exclusion is, rightly, a development priority. Attendance is broadly average. Robust systems are in place for following up absence and the recent introduction of the 'late gate' has improved students' punctuality.

## **Leadership and management**

Willowfield's leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, present a realistic perspective on immediate challenges, such as raising attainment. They share a commitment to maintaining the college's inclusiveness and to its role as a centre for teachers' professional development. The curriculum is good; its breadth and flexibility to meet most needs successfully are demonstrated by the very high proportion of students going on to further education or training. A governor, rightly, described the college as 'decent and honest' in its insistence that all students follow an academic core that keeps future options open and also students have sufficient choice of complementary courses to suit their individual interests and abilities. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Responsible citizenship is a pervasive theme, as a key aspect of the college's humanities specialism. In all subjects and in every year group, students are encouraged to consider different traditions and beliefs and to tackle complicated questions such as the health and fairness of our criminal justice system. An enterprising range of activities and projects encourages students to play a positive role in the community, promoting equality of respect and tackling discrimination. Year 8 students, for example, recently, compiled a map of 'hot spots' in the borough where children and young people feel at risk and are now in discussion with the police about possible responses. Arrangements for safeguarding meet all requirements and are effective.

Curriculum leaders are held accountable for the quality of teaching and learning in their departments. Regular lesson observations and detailed analysis of students' progress set priorities for whole-staff training and for targeted support and coaching. Senior leaders recognise that good practice is not yet consistent across all departments, particularly in lesson planning and the use of assessment to set appropriately challenging targets. These elements are currently the focus of staff training. The time and resources invested in professional development contribute significantly to teachers' buoyant morale, as a response to the staff questionnaire illustrates. 'We have extensive focused and practical training on strategies which I often implement in the classroom.' The impact on students' learning can be seen in their positive attitudes, their steadily improving attainment, and progress by all groups that is significantly better than average. There have been substantial improvements since the last inspection and capacity for improvement is good.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.



## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



13 January 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Willowfield Humanities College, London E17 6HL**

Thank you for the openness and good humour with which you responded when me and my colleagues came into your lessons and when we asked you to tell us what it is like to be a student at Willowfield. We agree with you that yours is a good school in which staff and students treat each other with respect and consideration. As one of you remarked, 'We all gel together.'

We found that most teaching is good and enables you to achieve results that prepare you for further education or training. The curriculum combines the academic subjects you need with varied options to meet your abilities and ambitions. You, rightly, say that you learn best when given opportunities to explore and test ideas in active and practical ways. We were pleased to know that you feel safe at school and that most of you feel that the school enables you to fulfil your potential.

So that Willowfield goes from strength to strength, we have asked your headteacher to ensure that:

- up-to-date information about your attainment and progress always influences lesson planning, and everyone who teaches you responds to the different ways in which you learn
- teachers always allow you enough uninterrupted time to work independently on a question or task
- alternatives to fixed-term exclusion are developed as far as possible for those who are disruptive or having difficulty in coping with aspects of school life.

Each of you can make a difference by attending regularly, having high expectations for yourself and working steadily to achieve them.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham  
Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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