

Wolsingham School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114297
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	363818
Inspection dates	3–4 March 2011
Reporting inspector	David Brown HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	740
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Robert Hopkinson
Headteacher	Ms Andrea Crawshaw
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 30 lessons and involved 28 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body, a local authority representative and nominated staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including its self-evaluation of its own work, lesson observation records, safeguarding procedures and other performance information. In addition, 264 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised along with questionnaires returned by school staff and by a representative sample of students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Levels of attainment and the progress made by different groups of students.
- The quality and consistency of teaching in the school and the extent to which this has an impact on the progress students make in different subjects.
- How effectively teachers use assessment data to ensure that lessons meet the needs and interests of all students regardless of their academic ability and how managers evaluate the impact of this on the quality of teaching and learning.
- The breadth of the curriculum offered in the sixth form.

Information about the school

Wolsingham School and Community College is smaller than the average-sized secondary school and serves a rural area to the west of Durham. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is very small. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is similar to the national average, but the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Most students travel to school by bus and some travel considerable distances.

The school has specialist status as a performing arts college, with the addition of a rural dimension. It holds a number of national awards including Advanced Healthy School status, Artsmark Gold, the Diana Anti-Bullying award, Safemark transport award, and is an Accelerated Reader Master School.

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

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Wolsingham is a good and improving school. The school community is notable for its highly positive relationships and has a sense of pride in the achievements of its students. A typical comment made by parents and carers, 'This is a friendly and welcoming school that allows students to achieve their potential in a very caring atmosphere' sums up their views well.

Students join the school with broadly average levels of attainment. The proportion of students gaining five good GCSE grades rose to 85% in 2010, which was a significant improvement on the previous year and well above the national average. This demonstrated good progress. However, overall attainment remains average because there is a significant variation in attainment between subjects. For example, attainment is broadly average in English and mathematics, is above average in English literature and religious education, but is below average in science where some weaker teaching hinders progress.

The focus on improving progress and developing skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) helps to ensure that students are well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers know their subjects well and in the best lessons use a wide range of well-planned resources to enhance their lessons and support students' learning. A common feature of the best lessons is the effective use of assessment to support students' learning but there are times when work is not planned well enough to match the needs and prior attainment of all students. The quality of written and oral feedback to students is variable and as a result, students are not always aware of their targets or how to achieve them.

Students and their parents or carers speak positively about the quality of care, guidance and support they receive. Any incidents of inappropriate behaviour arising are dealt with quickly and students know where they can go for advice and guidance or to talk over any issues they experience. As a result, behaviour around school and in lessons is good. Members of the sixth form speak highly about the support they receive and the excellent relationships they form with staff that help them to develop confidence and the right attitudes to progress to work or further training.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, and the increased flexibility at Key Stage 4 meets the varying needs of students. A varied programme of enrichment and extra-curricular activities also makes a valuable contribution to students' enjoyment of school. The school's specialism in performing arts has a positive impact on the school and widens the range of activities available to students.

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Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and senior team share a clear vision to sustain and improve students' achievement. They are ably supported and held to account by an effective governing body. Senior leaders are committed to improving the provision across the school as an aid to helping all students achieve at least in line with their capabilities and have a good track record of success. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and planning is well focused and as a result, the school is demonstrating a good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning across the whole school, by:
 - ensuring all teachers plan and deliver lessons that are closely matched to the needs and prior attainment of all students
 - building on existing good practice in the use of assessment to ensure a more consistent approach in providing high quality verbal and written feedback to students
 - refining the monitoring of the quality of teaching to ensure it has a more consistent impact on students' learning in all areas.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students make good progress in lessons and in developing their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. They have good attitudes to learning, are keen to work cooperatively and as a result of the supportive atmosphere for learning, students feel safe to take risks in expressing their ideas and opinions.

Examination results have improved over the past three years. The improvements in 2010 examinations show that the school has taken effective action to narrow the attainment gaps between particular groups. Although girls still tend to perform better than boys, the gap is narrowing. The school's accurate tracking system indicates that current levels of progress are good and attainment is rising; this is confirmed by the good learning and progress observed in lessons. Students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those special educational needs and/or disabilities progress at rates similar to those of their peers.

Behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Students show consideration for others and students of all ages form positive relationships with staff. Incidents of bullying are rare as a result of strategies implemented by the school, for example, the 'Amigos' are a group of students from different year groups who have been trained to be peer supporters. The school actively promotes healthy eating among its students, which has been recognised in its achievement of Healthy School status.

As a result, students develop a good understanding of what it means to live a healthy lifestyle. Students' contribution to the school and wider community is good overall. The school positively promotes the 'student voice' through its school council, and those students who met with inspectors were positive about this aspect of the school's provision. Student ambassadors attend governing body meetings and led the recent re-introduction of a formal school uniform.

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Despite a decline in the attendance rate for the autumn term 2010, due in part to the poor weather, students' overall attendance rate is broadly average and improving slowly.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The students know the difference between right and wrong. A high proportion of students participate in activities outside school that has a good impact on the development of a wider cultural understanding.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Good or better teaching was seen in the majority of the lessons observed during the inspection. Teachers form very positive working relationships, which motivate, challenge and engage the students in their learning. In one outstanding Year 10 lesson, for example, the students were encouraged to discuss and challenge contemporary views on the use of animals in sport. The quality and diversity of the discussion clearly motivated and interested the students, and ensured that all opinions were heard and valued. In the majority of lessons, students make good progress against clearly stated objectives. However, senior leaders and managers recognise from their monitoring that there is still too much variation in the quality of teaching across the school, especially in the use of assessment to support students' learning. Where assessment is effective, teachers use students' individual targets to match work accurately to their known capabilities, and ensure that questioning and marking further support the students' learning. In less

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effective lessons, there is insufficient challenge to the full ability range with more-able students, in particular, making slower progress.

The extent to which the curriculum meets the needs of all students is good. The curriculum is well planned, is broad and balanced, and allows a range of individual pathways for students that are well matched to their identified learning needs. The school has extended its provision for vocational courses at Key Stage 4 where the students are now able to choose from a wider range of different qualifications. Students particularly value the development of the Wolsiweb virtual learning platform through which they can access curriculum resources from home. The school makes good provision for the students to engage in physical exercise through programmed physical education and a range of sporting extra-curricular activities including dance, which are helping the pupils to appreciate the need to adopt a more active lifestyle.

The school places great emphasis on the provision of high quality care, guidance and support and staff know the students well. All students are aware of their academic targets and where underperformance is noted it is tackled at both an individual and group level. The school has used innovative approaches to tackle underperformance in mathematics, including using mathematics teachers as form tutors for some underachieving groups. There is highly effective support for all students and this contributes well to good learning, personal development and well-being. There are excellent transition arrangements for students when they enter the school and a programme of one-to-one interviews with Year 9 students when they are making their option choices ensures all are well matched to their chosen courses in Key Stage 4. The quality of support provided by the school is effective in helping many students overcome significant barriers to learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team provide strong direction and successfully communicate high expectations to staff and students. School improvement plans are focused on key priorities, and there are clear actions on what needs to be done to move the school further forward. The work of senior leaders is successful in a number of key areas, including the systematic improvements in behaviour throughout the school that are noted by staff and students, parents and carers. The evaluation of students' performance is detailed and rigorous and results in clearly defined intervention where appropriate. The system for tracking students' progress is accurate and effective and is providing data to support teachers in improving the rate of progress of all groups of students. Academic and pastoral staff at all levels take responsibility for the

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progress of students and work together well. Variations in attainment between different groups are closing due to effective strategies promoted by the school, for example, the Accelerated Reader programme has resulted in an improvement in boys' confidence and reading standards. The leadership team is well supported by the good work of middle leaders, who are actively involved both in checking the progress of students and the work of subject departments. The school promotes equal opportunities well and has appropriate policies in place. All students are treated fairly irrespective of gender, race or other characteristics.

The governing body has a good range of expertise and provides the support and challenge needed to sustain improvements. Governors receive regular progress reports from subject leaders and regular presentations from school staff. They are aware of a number of issues facing the school due to its rural isolation and are committed to its future development. Child protection procedures are strong and well-administered, and training for staff is thorough and of good quality. Safeguarding policies are actively reviewed and evaluated by senior managers and leaders including the governing body. All reasonable actions are taken to ensure that the school is safe.

The school has good and developing relationships with parents and carers and there are well established procedures for keeping them informed about their children's development and progress. They can access the 'parent portal' to see attendance records and other information on-line. The school's extensive partnership links, many of which relate to its performing arts specialism, make a strong contribution to students' good achievement. Students have participated in several dance festivals and support for dance and drama is offered to talented primary school pupils.

Senior leaders and managers understand the school context well, and focused actions to develop links with other schools have benefited the students by extending the range of accredited courses on offer at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Community cohesion is promoted within the school and wider community through a developing range of curricular and extra-curricular activities although the impact of these initiatives has not as yet been evaluated sufficiently.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form provides a satisfactory quality of education. Students make satisfactory progress at A and AS levels, achieving levels of attainment that are close to the national average. The curriculum meets the needs of its students satisfactorily. Expertise from partner schools is used well to enhance the school's own provision, which has enabled it to run additional A level courses in law and psychology.

Students make a good contribution to the school and wider community and many who spoke with inspectors said they value the opportunity to continue their education in what they correctly believe to be a highly supportive atmosphere. They enjoy their studies and appreciate the high levels of support and guidance they receive. This positively promotes their progression into the sixth form and onto the next stage in their lives. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory overall with similar inconsistencies to those seen in the main school. There is an effective system for setting targets and monitoring progress and students are appreciative of the guidance and support they receive from their teachers.

Leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory. Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the value of students being in education in this rural community and have good plans in place to improve the quality of provision in the sixth form.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers that responded to the parental questionnaire was higher than average and the overwhelming majority showed high levels of satisfaction with the school. In particular, almost all believe that their children enjoy school and feel that their children are safe. A small number of parents and carers who responded added written comments. Many praised the school, however, concerns which were raised included poor behaviour between lessons, poor teaching, and poor communications between the school and parents and carers. The inspection team investigated these concerns carefully and during the inspection found no evidence of poor behaviour and judged teaching and learning to be good. They also found that the school is making good efforts to communicate effectively with parents and carers. Positive written comments, including several letters sent to the inspection team, were focused on praising the school for its pastoral care and support of individual students. The strong set of positive responses from parents and carers endorses the inspectors' view that Wolsingham is a good school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Wolsingham School and Community College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 264 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 740 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	67	25	172	65	17	6	6	2
The school keeps my child safe	80	30	170	64	8	3	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	69	26	176	67	15	6	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	65	25	174	66	22	8	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	49	19	183	69	26	10	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	13	172	65	46	17	4	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	12	190	72	33	13	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	50	19	170	64	19	7	4	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	51	19	184	70	18	7	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	16	174	66	31	12	7	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	11	185	70	31	12	6	2
The school is led and managed effectively	48	18	189	72	16	6	5	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	58	22	176	67	20	8	6	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



10 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Wolsingham School and Community College, Bishop Auckland, DL13 3DN

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed talking to you and were pleased to be able to take your views into account. It was also very helpful that many of your parents and carers completed the questionnaire as we could also take account of their views. It is clear from the evidence that we collected that you enjoy being at school and feel well cared for by your teachers. You said that everyone is friendly and that there is a positive and supportive atmosphere in school. We judged that Wolsingham is a good school. The sixth form is satisfactory overall and valued highly by students. You are learning well and making good progress; your examination and test results are broadly average and improving. Teaching is good and your good standards of behaviour help this. The leaders and managers of the school know the school well and are clear about what needs to be done to improve further. They have made changes, for example, to behaviour policies, that you feel have made the school better and the inspectors agree with you.

To help the school improve further, we have said that senior leaders should further improve the quality of teaching across the whole school by:

- ensuring that all teachers plan and deliver lessons that are closely matched to your individual needs
- ensuring that assessment information is used more consistently in order to provide better feedback to you on your progress.

You can help your teachers by continuing to behave well and working hard at all times. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Brown

Lead inspector

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