

Wootton Upper School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109710
Local Authority	Bedford Borough
Inspection number	363757
Inspection dates	17–18 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1299
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Metcalf
Headteacher	Anthony Withell
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2007
School address	Wootton Upper School Hall End Road, Bedford MK43 9HT
Telephone number	01234 767123
Fax number	01234 765203
Email address	wootton@wootton.beds.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 4234

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 56 lessons, taught by 47 different teachers. In addition, they held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and four groups of students. They observed the school's operation, talked to many students informally, and looked at a wide range of documentation, including students' assessed work in lessons. In addition to returns of 405 parental questionnaires, inspectors considered responses from 89 staff and 150 student questionnaires.

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

- The inspectors examined the progress made by students in lessons, particularly for different groups of students, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and all students in English lessons.
- They considered the extent to which the school is monitoring and improving the quality of its teaching, learning and assessment in all subjects.
- They assessed the impact of the school's specialist arts status on the students' experiences, motivation and achievement.

Information about the school

Wootton Upper School is a larger than average comprehensive school. The school has held specialist arts college status since 2002. The majority of students are White British and speak English as their first language. Around 20% of the school's students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than average. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is similar to that found nationally. The school gained healthy schools award in 2009. Since September 2010, the school has been a member of "The Vale of Marston Schools' Trust". This trust was established to secure admissions into Wootton Upper School for children attending other schools in the trust.

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

1

Main findings

Wootton Upper School continues to be a good school and sixth form with many outstanding features. Since its last inspection it has strengthened much of its provision. The school uses its specialist arts status exceptionally well, not only in raising the aspirations of its students within the school but in raising aspirations more widely, often through its contemporary approach to theatrical performances. Students conduct themselves well and inspectors observed much good and at times exemplary behaviour. Consistently good or outstanding teaching both in the main school and sixth form ensures students achieve well and standards are rising notably for the vast majority. In a minority of lessons, the progress students make in the time available is not maximised and the school recognises further work is required to ensure the best assessment practice is shared across all subjects. Students have a strong voice in the school and benefit greatly from the extensive range of opportunities available for them to make a positive contribution. These include frequent music, dance and theatre performances and projects such as 'Greenify' which is helping to sustain the environment. In all cases, students apply themselves very well, are exceptionally well supported and develop outstanding personal qualities.

The school's collaborative work remains a key strength. The school is highly committed to working with external partners. It takes a leading role in a range of activities notably those connected with the specialism, which significantly enhance the curriculum and extend learning opportunities. The school is rightly held in high regard by parents and carers and the community.

The headteacher provides strong, assured leadership of the school with a clear focus on and commitment to improvement. The school has successfully created a culture of respect, enjoyment and high expectations in which students thrive personally and academically. The use of data by managers at all levels has improved and the tracking of student progress is thorough. As a result, students' achievement is consistently at least good across most subjects in the main school. While the sixth form saw high attainment and improved levels of consistency across AS subjects in 2010, this improvement has yet to be fully reflected across all A2 subjects. The school analyses the performance of students in great detail although the overarching reporting of trends in a few cases, such as the reduction in achievement gaps, is less well defined. The school has continued to invest heavily in high quality resources. The school's accommodation is very well maintained. The school's self-evaluation is used very well and the school knows exactly what it needs to do to improve. It has made excellent progress in improving the science results, a key area for development identified at the last inspection. The school has an outstanding capacity to improve.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and progress further for all groups of students by:
 - sharing more extensively the very best teaching and assessment practice that exists in the school so that all students make the maximum progress they are capable of in lessons
 - making sure the detailed tracking of different student groups is reported more clearly so the school is even better placed to review or celebrate the impact of its work.
- Ensure greater consistency in subject achievement in the sixth form, particularly but not exclusively at A2 level, by:
 - sharing the best teaching and learning practice so that students are more involved in their own learning
 - ensure the notable improvements seen at AS level in 2010 in both progress and attainment are sustained and subsequently reflected across all A2 subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enter the school with prior attainment that is, with some variation, just above average. Students make good progress and some make exceptional progress against their starting points. Attainment in most subjects is at least above average, including the school's specialist subjects, although the proportion of students gaining an A* to C in English has been consistently around national average for the last two years. The school has identified and targeted this appropriately and, as a result, the school's own data indicate that the current Year 11 pupils are well on track to increase English attainment to above average and this improvement was confirmed by classroom observations. The school's data indicate attainment in other subjects is also set to rise further. The school analyses the performance of different groups in great detail. Action taken this year by the school to improve English, particularly for boys, is already having a positive effect on reducing the achievement gap between genders.

Inspectors observed good progress in most lessons. The standard of students' performance work observed was very high. Students are punctual to lessons, enjoy learning and are able to articulate their views clearly. These attributes, along with the development of very good social skills, high levels of confidence and a firm grasp of numeracy, are preparing students very well for life after school. The vast majority of students progress successfully into further education at the end of Year 11.

Most students with special education needs and/or disabilities make good personal and academic progress in relation to their starting points and inspectors observed much high quality individual support that enabled these students to learn as effectively as their peers in lessons.

The impact of the school's specialist arts status on students' spiritual, moral and social development is very evident. Students show a very high awareness of social justice and are respectful to others. Students' cultural awareness and appreciation are widening through well-established links within the local community and abroad. The active promotion of healthier eating and regular exercise ensures students are very clear about

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the factors affecting their well-being and many choose to adopt healthy lifestyles as a result.

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	2
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	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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?

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and a high proportion of lessons are planned and taught well. Behaviour in lessons is good, although in a few lessons inspectors observed passive behaviour by students resulting from too much teacher-led activity for too long. Features of the best lessons included very good student participation, often through targeted questioning by the teacher that probed students' depth as well as breadth of knowledge and understanding. In addition, the pace of learning is rapid and students are involved actively in reviewing their own work and the work of their peers. In a minority of lessons, the activities planned are not sufficiently challenging to ensure all students make the maximum progress in the time available. In most cases students' work is marked frequently and written feedback on workbooks is used well by teachers to ensure students are clear about what they need to do to improve but this is inconsistent across subjects.

The curriculum has strengthened even further since the last inspection, increasing in both the range of vocational subjects and extra-curricular activities available to meet the needs and interests of its students. Students' high participation and involvement in these contribute notably to the development of their social and teamworking skills. A considerable number of students undertake additional qualifications offered in enterprise

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and finance which help support their future economic well-being. The school's specialist status permeates all it does and contributes significantly to increasing students' motivation. The school pushes the boundaries in performance arts to widen students' horizons and cultural understanding, such as performing the musical 'Cabaret' in Bremen, Germany.

All groups of students speak very highly of the support they receive and how staff go 'the extra mile' to help them. Clearly targeted support leads to good progress for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the school recognises that for a small minority of these students this has not been as effective. In response, the school has strengthened further its systematic monitoring and tracking of students' progress to bring about swifter and more focused intervention this year. Students know what their targets are and they know what they have to do to improve. Transition arrangements from middle schools remain excellent with a clear focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable students. Very good systems continue to ensure students get good quality information and guidance about the next stage in their education.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and his team of senior leaders are very clear about what the school needs to do to enable all students to achieve. They have high expectations of students both academically and in terms of their personal development. The headteacher's strategic planning is visionary in promoting the school's specialist status, identifying opportunities for further development and in responding to local community needs.

Self-evaluation is thorough and robust, and highly successful in bringing about sustained improvement in many areas such as the use of data by departments which is leading to greater consistency across subjects. The school improvement plan provides clear direction and targets for improvement. Middle leaders are proficient in monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision and students' progress, notably in identifying underperformance and providing appropriate intervention strategies. The consistency of subject performance has improved as a result. Leaders have placed a strong focus on improving teaching and assessment through rigorous monitoring and subsequently the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is improving. Exemplary practice is being demonstrated in several departments, together with an excellent use of assessment, although this is not yet fully consistent across the school.

The governing body's role in self-evaluation is well developed, and it acts as a critical friend in holding the senior team to account against the school's targets. While its

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monitoring of the school's performance is good, not all data are provided in a format that gives the governing body a clear overview to enable it monitor the impact of some of the schools work as effectively as it could. For example, some of the work the school is doing to promote equality of opportunity and reduce gaps in achievement is not scrutinised or, indeed, celebrated as well as it could be. Overall the promotion of equality of opportunity is good and the school has successfully created a culture of mutual respect among its students and staff. Safeguarding arrangements are good and are particularly thorough for vulnerable groups. Records show few incidents of bullying in the school and many students have been actively involved in the review of the school's bullying policy.

The school has an informed understanding of its context and is a highly cohesive community. Its work in promoting community cohesion is very strong within the local area and through a wide range of public productions and presentations. These include the wide range of community events and activities through the Arts specialism, including massed choirs from lower schools, outreach work in drama and dance, community concerts and work with arts professionals. They also include trips to linked schools in Germany, and with Ghana and Romania. Students' understanding of other communities and cultures is particularly well developed through the specialism, and a range of extra-curricular activities. The school has not, however, systematically evaluated the impact of this work fully.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

The sixth form is good with several outstanding features. Students make good progress in their time at the sixth form and achieve well. The number of students achieving high grades in AS subjects in the sixth form improved markedly in 2010 to be well above average and school data indicates this has continued for 2011. For A2 subjects, whilst the

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attainment of high grades was more uneven it was broadly in line with the national average. School data indicate more marked improvement for this year. Students very much enjoy their studies and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Their maturity and behaviour result in them being excellent role models for younger students and overall ambassadors for the school. Sixth form students' participation in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities is high. This, along with active involvement in, and support of, the school's wide array of performances in theatre, music and dance, helps students develop outstanding leadership qualities. A very high and increasing proportion of students progress successfully to higher education.

Teaching, learning and assessment are good. In the very best lessons, students are encouraged to be engaged more directly in their learning. The curriculum is wide-ranging and provides an excellent choice of subjects to appeal to students' needs and interests, including an increasing selection of vocational options. The sixth form is very well led and actions taken to bring about greater consistency across subjects, such as the strengthening of initial guidance, extending the curriculum offer and more comprehensive tracking of students are contributing very effectively to improving many aspects of students' outcomes. As a result, the school's sixth form has an excellent capacity to improve further.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

A fairly good proportion of parental questionnaire returns were received during the inspection. The parental questionnaires revealed that most parents and carers who responded were highly supportive of the school's work. The vast majority of written comments were positive and expressed high levels of satisfaction with the school. Inspectors endorsed the majority of parental views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Wootton Upper School 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 405 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1299 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	120	30	259	64	20	5	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	136	34	254	63	11	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	110	27	263	65	22	5	6	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	115	28	253	62	30	7	2	0
The teaching is good at this school	104	26	277	68	17	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	83	20	262	65	44	11	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	61	15	266	66	60	15	3	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)	127	31	231	57	31	8	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	119	29	245	60	28	7	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	86	21	271	67	23	6	5	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	61	15	265	65	43	11	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	145	36	236	58	12	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	160	40	225	56	12	3	2	0

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.



21 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Wootton Upper School, Bedford, MK43 9HT

I would like to thank you all for welcoming me and my four colleagues to your school. Your courtesy and positive outlook impressed us from the outset. We found the overall effectiveness of your school and sixth form to be good with many outstanding features. We judged the school and sixth form to have an outstanding capacity to improve further. We noted several excellent features of your school, including its curriculum, which is giving you a wide and growing range of subjects and extra-curricular activities to choose from, and its specialist status for the arts which is allowing many of you to get more involved in the community. You told us that you receive very good levels of support and you are given the right skills and knowledge to do well when you leave school. We also found this to be the case.

There are two areas we felt the school could improve further:

Raise your attainment and progress further by sharing more extensively the very best teaching and assessment practice so that all of you make the maximum progress of which you are capable.

Ensure greater consistency in subject achievement in the sixth form, particularly but not exclusively at A2 level, by again sharing the best teaching and learning practice so that your progress and learning can be accelerated to achieve your potential in every subject.

Your headteacher, along with his team, is doing a very good job in ensuring Wootton Upper School's continued success. The school knows what is needed to improve and is committed to making your experience in education enjoyable and successful. You can of course help the school on its journey to excellence by attending regularly and continuing to work as hard as you can in every lesson to achieve your best.

Thank you again for your help in this inspection and we would like to wish you all the very best in your studies and every success in the future. We hope your forthcoming performance of Shakers goes very well.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Vaughan-Jenkins

Her Majesty's Inspector

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