

Lord Williams's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123268
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	380634
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Ian Hodgkinson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
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	2074
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	474
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Underwood (acting)
Headteacher	David Wybron
Date of previous school inspection	21–22 March 2007
School address	Oxford Road Thame Oxfordshire OX9 2AQ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 39 teachers and 39 lessons, and visited briefly other lessons and activities. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors and students. Inspectors looked at documentation, including: students' books; the school development and action plans; records of assessment and tracking of students' progress; plans and monitoring information for the support of vulnerable students; records of the school's arrangements for the safeguarding and protection of students; and policies and procedures for promoting equality and countering discrimination. In addition, inspectors considered 303 questionnaire responses from parents and carers, together with those from staff and students.

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

- The level of attainment for current cohorts of students and whether in the light of some fluctuations in GCSE results attainment remains high overall.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in securing consistently high quality of teaching and learning across all subjects.
- The success of the school in raising attainment and closing gaps in performance between key groups of students, especially for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities at the level of 'school action plus'.
- The factors explaining the school's apparent success in further improving aspects of students' personal development, including their significant improvements in attendance.

Information about the school

Lord Williams's is much larger than the average-sized secondary school and has a very large sixth form. It serves the town of Thame and surrounding villages. There are two self-contained sites at opposite sides of the town, the lower school for students in Key Stage 3 and the upper school for students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Staff teach on both sites and commute between lessons. The vast majority of students are White British and the percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average; the school provides for students with a wide range of needs, including behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and physical disabilities. The percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is above average, as the school provides a specialist resource base for students with autism. Since 2001, the school has been designated as a specialist sports school and as a Training School for teacher education. It has also achieved the Healthy School and International School awards.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Lord Williams's is an outstanding school. It offers its students an exceptionally broad range of opportunities to develop their talents and interests, through a very well-resourced curriculum and the strong commitment of staff to a rich extra-curricular programme. Students make good progress so that by Year 11 their attainment is high. A large majority continue their studies in the school's good sixth form provision, from which a high proportion go to their chosen university, and others successfully enter employment or training. Many aspects of their personal development are outstanding and, taken together with their excellent achievement and high attendance, students are exceptionally well prepared for later life.

The excellent leadership and management of this large and complex organisation is based on exceptionally thorough and accurate school self-evaluation. This has secured high quality provision and excellent outcomes for students, and demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity to improve. Leaders at all levels, including the governing body, have a very well-developed understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the key challenges ahead. They have therefore been able to take decisive and successful action to improve the school's performance in key areas. For example, the attainment and progress of the very small number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and of those with special educational needs at the level of school action plus was a cause for concern, linked in some cases to poor attendance. The school's redesigned systems for pastoral care, support and intervention, featuring the excellent Fast Forward meetings which tailor support packages precisely to students' needs, have led to demonstrable improvements in attendance and achievement for both of those previously underperforming groups. Care, guidance and support for all students, including those most at risk of underachievement, are excellent.

Gaps in attainment and progress between subjects are narrowing too, as a result of a very effective line management system which establishes clear accountability for performance at every level. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning by senior and middle leaders enables strengths and areas for development to be clearly recognised. The school's Training School expertise makes an effective contribution to the professional development of its staff as well as for trainee teachers and staff from other schools. Teaching is good overall, and shows significant strengths in teachers' high expectations, challenging questioning, and regular checking of students' understanding throughout lessons. Some outstanding teaching was seen by inspectors, but some inconsistencies remain which prevent teaching from being

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judged outstanding overall. The quality of teachers' marking of students' work is variable in its helpfulness in showing students how to improve and getting them to act on this advice. Even in good lessons, work is not always sufficiently well matched to pupils' capabilities, so that on occasions some find work too easy, or in a few cases too difficult. On a few occasions the pace of lessons is pedestrian so that students' enthusiasm and engagement are reduced.

A 'healthy body, healthy mind agenda' permeates the school's work, ensuring high levels of participation in a range of sporting, cultural and community events. The school's sports specialism makes a highly significant contribution to the development of students as well-rounded individuals who cooperate constructively, take responsibility willingly, and show much determination to succeed.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the overall quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that tasks are consistently well matched to students' capabilities, and that teachers' planning is informed by a clear understanding of students' prior attainment
 - ensuring that marking clearly shows students how they can improve their work, and that students act on this advice
 - ensuring that teachers consistently promote students' engagement by keeping up the pace of learning in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Attainment in GCSE examinations has fluctuated in recent years but has remained high on most key measures since the last inspection. This represents good progress given students' generally above-average starting points. High proportions of students successfully attain GCSE passes at grade C or above in the English Baccalaureate subjects of English, mathematics, science, modern languages and humanities. In most of these subjects, pass rates are also high at the top grades of A* and A, reflecting strong progress for the most able students who thrive in an environment where expectations are high. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those in the resource base for students with autism, also make good progress as a result of detailed planning of provision to support their individual needs. Students have a great capacity for independent learning, and organise themselves very effectively when working in teams to complete a task or solve a problem. Students' good behaviour often makes a significant contribution to their effective learning in class. However, in the very small minority of lessons where the pace of learning is slow students can be passive in their approach and some low-level off-task chatter can be distracting.

Both of the school sites are calm and well ordered and students say they feel very

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safe. Comprehensive programmes, sometimes led by the school’s sports specialism, permeate the school curriculum to ensure that students develop a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. Students have a very clear voice in the way the school is run, with, for example, sixth form representatives of the school council playing an active part in each full governing body meeting. Students play a leading role in the school’s extensive programme of links with the local and wider community. For example, many students lead a wide range of sports activities in partner primary schools. The involvement of substantial numbers of students in working links on development projects with schools in the Gambia and India, among other countries, reflects very positively on the school’s International School status. Students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They develop excellent skills in working together and a strong sense of right and wrong, but their spiritual development, and their understanding of aspects of cultural diversity, while good, are not consistently outstanding features.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	1
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	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers make very good use of the often excellent resources which are available to stimulate students’ interest, engagement and participation in lessons. For example, outstanding teaching was seen in lessons using the school’s high quality accommodation and resources in physical education, drama and music. Information and communication technology (ICT) is often well used by teachers to present images to stimulate students’ thinking and by students to develop their work. Good,

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

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supportive relationships exist between teachers and students. Students appreciate the amount of time given by staff to support their learning and personal development outside of lessons by offering additional advice, mentoring and enrichment activities. Teachers’ high expectations of their students are shown in their brisk and effective management of lesson activities, and in their probing questioning of students to draw out detailed responses. During lessons, teachers check regularly on students’ understanding. The quality of teachers’ marking of students’ work varies, with some excellent practice but some which lacks specific guidance to students on how to improve. Teachers do not all use assessment information on students’ prior attainment well enough to match tasks to students’ capabilities.

The curriculum has a strong and successful focus on developing students’ basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, together with high achievement in traditional core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The sports specialism also secures strong achievement and high levels of participation in sport and physical education. Beyond these subjects the curriculum offers wide choice of academic and vocational provision so that, in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form in particular, courses can be precisely tailored to individual interests, aspirations and capabilities. Curriculum breadth and quality are secured through wide-ranging partnerships with other schools, colleges, businesses and training providers. An extensive extra-curricular programme of clubs and visits significantly enriches students’ experiences of school, and makes a strong contribution to students’ excellent personal development and well-being. For example, a large number of students develop skills of leadership and self-reliance through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, and many parents and carers act as mentors on this scheme, working alongside school staff.

Pastoral structures for the care, guidance and support of all students are well understood, so that students are very confident that they can get help when they need it. Systems to guide and support students most vulnerable to underachievement, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are highly effective. Provision is highly personalised for students with behavioural difficulties in support bases on both sites; they receive excellent advice and guidance about course choices and a high proportion stay on in the sixth form. Fast Forward meetings of key school staff and external agencies are highly effective in shaping individual support for students. The school has been highly successful in reducing the amount of persistent absence to low levels. Very strong partnership working with other schools, colleges, businesses and external agencies ensures that students receive excellent advice and guidance at key points of transition, including before they arrive in Year 7 and when making career and course choices later on.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
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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 promotes a very clear vision for an inclusive school which equips all students with the key skills and personal qualities to achieve their goals and make a positive contribution to their community. He distributes leadership very effectively through an able senior team and well-organised faculty structure. A tightly managed cycle of performance review, self-evaluation and development planning at faculty and whole-school levels ensures that the whole school is continuously focused on improvement. Detailed monitoring of the performance and well-being of individuals and groups of students enables leaders and managers at all levels to be alert to significant differences in achievement and take action successfully to promote equality of opportunity for all. For example, the underachievement of boys noted at the last inspection has been overcome by successfully focused interventions.

The governing body has a detailed involvement in shaping the vision for the future direction of the school and in scrutinising its performance. It has well-established procedures for linking with faculties and finding out the views of staff, students, parents and carers. Its careful management of the school's finances has secured excellent resources for learning. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are very thorough and exceptionally well monitored by specific staff and the governors' safeguarding committee. The school's leading role in its local community comes as a result of a detailed understanding of how it can use its resources to the benefit of all. As a consequence, it acts as a hub for local sports development and teacher education, and offers a very wide range of extended services for students and their families. A rich network of international links helps to promote students' awareness of key issues across the global community. Innovative methods are in place to communicate with parents and carers, and to involve them in their children's learning, for example through actions arising from Fast Forward meetings.

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	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

This is a good sixth form. It has a number of outstanding features. Outcomes are good because teaching is effective and the exceptionally broad and rich curriculum provides a wide range of learning experiences which ensure students make good progress given their starting points. The outstanding curriculum and high quality provision for students’ care, guidance and support ensure that students’ personal development and well-being are excellent. While their rate of learning is good overall there is some variation in students’ performance. For example, some students make outstanding progress in a number of AS level subjects but there are also pockets of progress that are no better than satisfactory in some subjects. Students say that they really enjoy sixth form life and this is demonstrated in their high attendance. Students play a leading role in the school and in its partnerships locally and internationally.

The large majority of teaching is characterised by high expectations, challenging work well matched to students’ capabilities and a good balance between collaborative and individual study. In the small minority of lessons where teaching is less effective, it is because work is undemanding and too directed by the teacher. Students spoke highly of the excellent support and guidance they had received in Year 11 to enable them to choose the right course of study. Few students drop out of courses and the retention rate is very high. Students also receive first-class help with university applications. Sixth form students from other schools report that induction arrangements are very good and enable them to settle quickly.

The head of sixth form, in collaboration with other senior leaders, has created a shared vision, ambitious plans and a well-motivated and committed staff, which have resulted in good and improving outcomes for students. Links with parents, carers and outside agencies are outstanding and ensure support is targeted efficiently and very effectively when needed. The monitoring, evaluation and tracking of students’ performance are given high priority and are highly effective. Information gained from analysis is used to successfully narrow gaps in learning within and between subjects.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2

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Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers have overwhelmingly positive views of the school’s provision and leadership in nearly all regards. Many parents wrote in strong praise of the school’s ‘exemplary’ systems of pastoral care, including for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Similarly, many parents of students newly arrived in Year 7 wrote in praise of the arrangements for their children’s transition from primary to secondary school: ‘The transitional arrangements have been great and she has had a really warm welcome’ was a comment typical of many. A few parents have concerns about low-level disruptive behaviour and bullying between students. Inspectors examined responses from student surveys and held formal and informal discussions with groups of students, and found that students overwhelmingly feel safe and feel that bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. Inspectors found that students behave well overall, and that instances of poor behaviour distracting others from learning were very few.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Lord Williams’s 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 303 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 2,150 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	140	46	145	48	12	4	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	154	51	139	46	8	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	118	39	157	52	11	4	5	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	99	33	160	53	19	6	7	2
The teaching is good at this school	100	33	174	57	11	4	2	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	90	30	163	54	28	9	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	78	26	195	64	17	6	1	0
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)	134	44	125	41	11	4	3	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	97	32	163	54	19	6	5	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	92	30	152	50	31	10	7	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	72	24	167	55	21	7	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	122	40	145	48	11	4	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	153	50	123	41	15	5	3	1

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



16 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Lord Williams's School, Thame OX9 2AQ

Many thanks for the welcome you gave to me and my colleagues when we visited the school for its recent inspection. We much appreciated the time you gave us in discussions, and got a sense from talking to you of the self-confident, well-organised young people the school helps to develop. These qualities enable you to get fully involved in the very broad range of activities available in the school and in its projects in the local and global community. Taken together with your outstanding achievement and high attendance, they also ensure that you are exceptionally well prepared for later life.

We judge Lord Williams's to be an outstanding school. Through good teaching and an excellent curriculum, you attain high results at GCSE, including in the English Baccalaureate subjects of English, mathematics, science, humanities and modern foreign languages. Many of you take your studies on into the school's good sixth form, and beyond that into higher education. The school takes very good care of your safety and well-being. It has excellent systems in place to identify those who need extra help and to design support packages which are carefully tailored to meet individual needs. The sports specialism very successfully helps support your understanding of how to live healthily.

The school's excellent leadership and management carefully evaluate the school's performance and plan very effectively to improve it. To improve further, the school needs to strengthen some aspects of teaching to ensure that teaching moves from good to outstanding. In particular, we have asked teachers to ensure that work is always well matched to students' capabilities in order to make sure that it is not too easy or too difficult. We have also asked that marking of your work should be more consistently helpful, and that the pace of learning in lessons should consistently match that of the best.

I am sure that you will continue to support the school's improvement through your hard work and positive contribution. I wish you every success.

Yours sincerely

Ian Hodgkinson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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