

Writhlington School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	137548
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	386218
Inspection dates	19–20 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Grahame Sherfield HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
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	1557
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	344
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Akers
Headteacher	Mark Everett
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2007
School address	Knobsbury Lane Writhlington Radstock BA3 3NQ
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 45 lessons and observed 44 teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. Inspectors looked at key documents, such as the school's plans for improvement and the minutes of meetings of the governing body, as well as 183 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

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

- How successfully the school is improving students' progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- How much progress students make in the sixth form.
- How successfully the school is acting to improve teaching.
- How well the subjects of the curriculum promote literacy and numeracy skills.
- How far leaders at all levels contribute to the development of the school.

Information about the school

Writhlington is larger than average and serves a mainly White British community in a mostly rural area. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including with a statement of special educational needs, is below what is found nationally. The number known to be eligible for free school meals is also below average.

The school moved into new accommodation in 2010 and a new post-16 centre opened in September 2011. Writhlington is a high-performing specialist school with specialisms in business and enterprise and applied learning. A new headteacher took up his post on 1 September 2011.

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

Writhlington is a good and rapidly improving school. Students' behave well and flourish within the very caring and supportive environment created by the headteacher and the staff. Arrangements for safeguarding students are outstanding and students report that they feel very safe in the school. Most parents and carers are supportive of the school. One commented that 'my daughter has found real motivation to do well here', while another noted that the school 'contributes hugely to the local community'. These positive views are representative of the very large majority of those who returned the questionnaire and supported by inspection evidence.

Students make good and improving progress and achieve well by the end of Year 11. There has been a significant improvement in the progress that students make in English and mathematics. Both the school's own data and inspection evidence indicate that this improvement is continuing. Attainment is above average and rising. The school's success in improving teaching has made an important contribution to raising attainment. Staffing for mathematics has been strengthened and the school accords high importance to teachers' professional development, providing time for this every week. Students' progress monitored is very carefully and additional support and challenge have been provided where needed. The school checks the impact of the support and challenge thoroughly and makes adjustments where necessary. There have also been changes in teaching groups, for example the introduction of single-sex teaching groups, which have had a positive impact. Teaching is good overall and some is outstanding. However, sometimes, teachers provide the same tasks for all students in the class, when some need more challenge and others require more structured support. Some marking is excellent with clear guidance on how to do better, but this is not consistent. Students benefit from the good curriculum, which includes some exceptional opportunities, for example in developing their skills in information and communication technology. Although practice is good overall, the quality of provision for developing literacy and numeracy skills in the other subjects of the curriculum varies. Students in the sixth form are making good and improving progress as a result of the outstanding provision.

Students make an excellent contribution to the school and the wider community. They enjoy school and their attendance is high. Students are outstandingly well prepared for their future economic well-being and benefit from a wide range of often exceptional opportunities for personal development, for example the combined cadet force and the wide range of enterprise activities provided.

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The new headteacher has quickly gained a clear view of the school's strengths and areas for development, supported by the strong senior team and effective governing body, and by rigorous and broadly accurate self-evaluation. He has successfully engaged staff and students and this has contributed to a widely shared commitment to continuous improvement. The specialist status is making a positive contribution to the school's development and to community links and partnerships are outstanding. Challenging targets are used well to raise standards by the end of Year 11 and the school has some highly effective middle leaders. Consequently, the capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - securing the consistent use of approaches that meet students' varying learning needs well
 - improving teachers' skills in checking progress during lessons and in providing clear guidance on how to do better in their marking
 - sharing the best practice within the school.
- Provide consistently good opportunities for students to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in the other subjects of the curriculum.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students get on well with each other and with the staff. They behave and work well in lessons, both individually and in small groups. Students respond particularly well when teachers use their very good understanding of students' levels of attainment to ensure that activities meet needs very well. For example, in a Year 9 physical education lesson, students made excellent progress when the teacher targeted support precisely and maintained an excellent balance of modelling what was required and enabling students to participate fully. Also, students rise to the challenge of applying new skills. For example, in a Year 7 modern foreign languages lesson students were engaged fully by a series of brisk, interactive activities. They respond very well also to a variety of different styles of learning. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson on Pythagoras, different types of activity, combined with highly effective questioning from the teacher, resulted in a deep and purposeful discussion of what they were learning.

The achievement of all groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is currently good and improving quickly. Students enjoy school and are polite, care for each other and listen to adults and their peers with respect. They have a good understanding of the importance of diet and exercise in a healthy lifestyle. Students report that they are confident in turning to an adult in

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school in the event of needing help or advice on a health issue. Many make a very strong contribution to the school community, for example through acting as mentors, and students are confident that their voice is heard. Students have particular strengths in their moral and social development and in their understanding of other cultures, such as in China. Their understanding of the United Kingdom as a multicultural society is less well developed.

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	2
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 have established good relationships in the classrooms. The school has an impressive framework in place to guide teachers in promoting students' learning. In the best teaching observed, teaching was clearly informed by that framework. Lessons were characterised by teachers' excellent subject knowledge and very good use of a range of resources to support brisk progress in students' learning through varied and well-planned activities. Teachers checked understanding well at appropriate points during lessons, using skilfully designed questions, and, as a result, had a good knowledge of students' strengths and areas for improvement. The rapport between students and teachers was often very good and marking of work provided clear guidance on how to do better. Where satisfactory teaching was seen, assessment information was not being used well to match classroom activities to students' varied learning needs and teachers were less skilled in checking students' learning during the lessons. As a result, students' progress slowed.

The curriculum meets students' needs well through a range of carefully designed

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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'pathways'. The specialist status makes a very positive contribution to the curriculum, such as through some exceptional enterprise activities. For example, the Orchid Enterprise Company has carried out conservation work in distant parts of the globe as well as won prestigious awards for its work. Students use their netbooks frequently in their learning in school and at home. Some outstanding practice was seen in developing literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects, for example literacy in some art and design lessons, while in other lessons opportunities were missed to contribute fully to developing students' skills. There is a wide range of high-quality extra-curricular activities that are generally well attended.

The school is highly inclusive and very welcoming. Support and guidance staff monitor students' academic and personal development closely and work very well with students and their families to address any difficulties. Highly effective links with a range of agencies enable those students in need of a little extra help to make the most of their opportunities in school. Arrangements for students joining the school in Year 7 are designed well to enable them to settle in very quickly. Outstanding procedures are in place to ensure that students' high attendance is maintained.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Staff share the ambition for the continuing improvement of the school and responded well to the opportunity to contribute to identifying the school's key strengths and areas for development provided by the headteacher and the senior team. Senior leaders have very effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work and middle leaders carry out detailed reviews in each subject and aspect resulting in thorough action plans. The headteacher is rightly keen to build on these systems to develop more active involvement from staff at all levels, as well as students, in the continuing improvement of the school. The governing body is informed well by the headteacher and other senior staff, benefiting from detailed and realistic evaluations of students' progress, and has a good knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. It is thus well placed to ask suitable questions of leaders and managers. Its links with the various subjects and aspects of the school include visits to gain first-hand knowledge of its work, although these are not linked systematically enough with whole-school priorities.

The school ensures that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities

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make good progress. That shows its effectiveness in promoting equal opportunities for all students to achieve as well as they can. It strives also to ensure that discrimination against any group is avoided at all times. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It is a highly cohesive community with very strong links with the local area, where the specialist subjects play an important role. Relationships with a school in China are well established and it is intended to establish links with an establishment in a contrasting area in the United Kingdom.

Outstanding partnerships with external organisations extend the opportunities for students in their work and in their personal development. Multi-agency approaches are used to support individual students as needed and there are very good links with local schools and colleges. The school’s arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding. Careful checks are made on all adults who work within the school and all necessary policies are implemented very well.

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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
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

Students achieve well from their starting points at the beginning of Year 12. Vocational courses are very well established and there has been significant improvement in A-level provision, although this has not yet had its full impact on students’ achievement. Sixth form numbers have increased sharply. Students’ personal development is outstanding. They take pride in their work and are effective, independent learners. Students enjoy their time in Years 12 and 13 and contribute significantly to the running of the sixth form. For example, they decided recently that space in the new post-16 centre should become a study area rather than a common room. Students benefit from the many opportunities to take on leadership roles, for

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example in running sports activities with partner primary schools. As one student put it, 'you can do so much here'.

The care, guidance and support provided are excellent and students report that nothing is too much trouble for the staff who are widely available for extra help or one-to-one consultations. Students' progress is monitored carefully and the monthly review meetings with tutors are highly valued. The curriculum is an outstanding feature of the provision and offers a very wide range of academic and vocational courses. Students are guided carefully in choosing the most appropriate route to meet their needs. As a result, attendance is high and the very large majority complete their courses. All students go on to higher education, many to universities, or to other training or employment as appropriate. Students value the teaching they receive, which ensures that they are fully involved through engaging activities and learning that proceeds at a fast pace.

The new director of the sixth form has a clear view of what needs to be done to improve the sixth form further, although this is not yet supported by an appropriate action plan. He has already renewed some links with local colleges and the sixth form leadership team is regarded very highly by the students. Plans are in place for the leadership team to play a greater role in monitoring teaching and learning in the sixth form.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers who responded have positive views on most aspects featuring in the Ofsted questionnaire. Almost all believe the school keeps their children safe and the very large majority are happy overall with their children's experience and believe that their children enjoy school. A very small minority expressed concerns about how the school helps their children to have a healthy lifestyle and the information provided on their children's progress. Inspection evidence indicates that healthy lifestyles are promoted well through aspects of the curriculum and through various sporting activities, although fewer students from Years 10 and 11 are involved in the latter than those from Years 7 to 9. Parents and carers are provided with a report on progress at three points in the year and assessment information is now available via the parent portal.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Writhlington 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 183 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1557 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	65	36	105	57	7	4	4	2
The school keeps my child safe	77	42	101	55	2	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child’s progress	61	33	86	47	21	11	3	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	65	36	95	52	8	4	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	53	29	105	57	6	3	2	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	60	33	97	53	14	8	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	16	115	63	27	15	3	2
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)	57	31	100	55	12	7	3	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	58	32	107	58	8	4	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	50	27	103	56	13	7	4	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	31	17	104	57	19	10	4	2
The school is led and managed effectively	67	37	87	48	7	4	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	84	46	87	48	5	3	5	3

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.



21 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Writhlington School, Writhlington BA3 3NQ

Thank you for your involvement in the recent inspection, particularly for the friendly and open way in which you talked to us. Your school is good and improving rapidly. This is a summary of our main findings, although I hope you will wish to read the full report for yourselves.

- You make good and improving progress in your work by the end of Year 11. Attainment is above average and rising.
- Students in the sixth form achieve well as a result of the outstanding provision.
- Your behaviour is good and you work well in most of your lessons.
- The teaching and the curriculum are good.
- The school cares for you exceptionally well, safeguarding arrangements are outstanding and you told us you feel very safe.
- You make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community.
- Your attendance is excellent and you are exceptionally well prepared for your future economic well-being.
- The governing body, the headteacher and the other staff are determined to ensure that the school continues to improve.

I have asked the school to improve two aspects:

- Teaching is good, but sometimes teachers do not adjust the level of difficulty in the work you do to meet your varying needs. Teachers do not always check your progress enough during lessons or give enough help in their marking on how you could do better. I have asked the school to address this. You can help by doing your very best in response to the approaches the teachers use and acting on their suggestions on how you could improve
- Some work in other subjects does not do enough to help you to develop your skills in literacy and numeracy. I have asked the school to ensure that wherever possible work in other subjects helps you to improve these skills.

Thank you again for your involvement in the inspection and I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely
Grahame Sherfield
Her Majesty's Inspector

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