

Inspection of Lord Williams's School

Oxford Road, Thame, Oxfordshire OX9 2AQ

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 May 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected 11 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend this school. Staff have high expectations for pupils. Pupils get off to a flying start at the lower school. Lessons build on prior knowledge learned in primary schools. In the popular sixth-form, students study a wide range of academic and vocational courses. Older pupils take on positions of responsibility, for example, on the student leader programme. There are many opportunities to complete voluntary work. The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme is highly successful, with over 200 pupils taking part each year. This enables pupils to develop talents and interests as well as building positive character traits.

Pupils feel safe at school and they know they have someone to talk to if they have worries. Pupils say that bullying is not tolerated here. They told inspectors, 'It is ok to be yourself here as we celebrate differences'. Some parents and pupils told inspectors that they feel that staff do not deal with bullying effectively.

The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils engage well in lessons. Sixth-form students are mature in their approach to independent study.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum that prepares pupils for life beyond school. In most subjects, curriculum sequencing enables pupils to build on prior learning. However, the curriculum in some subjects, including mathematics, does not prepare students well for further study in the sixth form. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They use this to enthuse and inspire pupils in lessons and beyond. Occasional low-level disruption in lessons occurs as a result of inconsistencies in teaching. Leaders are aware of this and are taking steps to support teachers to eradicate this.

The large sixth form provides access to a wide range of qualifications for students of all abilities. Students follow either an academic route or study a range of vocational and academic qualifications.

In most subjects, teachers use assessment to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills. Subsequently, lesson activities enable pupils to overcome misconceptions or gaps. Pupils who are disadvantaged or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well. Teachers receive specialist training to support learning and tailor lessons to individual pupils' needs. There is a focus on support for weaker readers at key stage 3. Individually tailored plans effectively help pupils to quickly catch up with reading skills. At key stage 4, leaders recognise that not enough pupils currently gain qualifications in the English baccalaureate. Leaders are working hard to address this by increasing the number of pupils who study modern foreign languages.

Leaders have crafted a thorough programme of personal development. Careers education enables pupils to make informed choices about their future in education, training or work. Pupils learn about democracy and debating in 'Learning for Life' (L4L). A comprehensive programme of social, moral, cultural and spiritual education prepares pupils for life in modern Britain. The wide-ranging personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme teaches pupils, among other things, about keeping healthy and safe. Assemblies, tutor time, the physical education programme and visiting experts all contribute to high-quality delivery of the PSHE programme. A plethora of extra-curricular clubs enriches the curriculum. Leaders are aware that they need to continue to encourage pupils to re-engage with these activities, especially as uptake in some activities is low due to the pandemic.

There is a specialist resource provision on site for pupils with specific SEND needs. These pupils benefit from both individual support and learning alongside their peers. Some pupils with SEND have modified timetables to help them overcome their own individual challenges, for example, one student in the sixth form told inspectors how the school is helping her realise her career ambitions when she leaves school and goes on to study at university in her chosen field.

Staff provide high-quality pastoral support, with well-trained staff dedicated to supporting pupils with academic and health matters. One parent, typical of many, told inspectors, 'the school shows genuine care for our child'. Students in the sixth form mentor younger pupils and take on extra responsibilities, such as completing supervisory duties at lunchtime.

Trustees and governors support the school effectively and provide appropriate challenge in most matters. Parents are positive about the school. Staff are proud to work here, and support staff appreciate the opportunities for career progression and professional development. Leaders balance staff well-being with a focus on improving standards for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has an effective system for identifying pupils who may need early help, or who are at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation. Dedicated pastoral staff, alongside safeguarding leaders, ensure that pupils receive appropriate and timely help. Safeguarding concerns are managed efficiently and effectively. Leaders meet regularly and review cases and concerns, taking valuable learning from complex cases to further protect and safeguard children.

Leaders have created an appropriate safeguarding curriculum to educate and prepare pupils for life as young adults. The L4L programme equips pupils with age-appropriate knowledge and skills, including teaching them about current issues such as online sexual abuse and sexual violence.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Curriculum thinking in some subjects, for example, in physical education, is not as well developed as in others. The carefully constructed sequence of learning, that enables pupils to know more and remember more, is not as finessed as leaders want it to be. This means pupils do not always learn how to do more or remember more as a result of the teaching they experience. Subject leaders should continue to refine their curriculum thinking in these subjects so that pupils are able to remember key knowledge and learn new skills more effectively.
- Leaders understand that although they have policies and procedures in place to address bullying, some parents and pupils do not understand fully how bullying is addressed by the school. As a result, not all pupils and parents are as clear as they need to be of the school's processes. Leaders and staff need to take further steps to ensure that all pupils and parents have a stronger understanding of the school's response to bullying.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138667
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10239650
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2207
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	524
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Underwood
Headteacher	Jon Ryder
Website	www.lordwilliams.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 October 2011

Information about this school

- Lord Williams's school is a larger than average secondary school. It is situated across two sites. Thame leisure centre is on the upper school site and the Phoenix trail, part of the national cycle route, runs through the middle of the school site.
- The school is the founding member of the Thame Partnership Academy Trust, which currently has no other members.
- The school uses five registered and one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 11 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science, physical education, humanities, design technology and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and other safeguarding leaders. They reviewed documentation related to safeguarding. They spoke to staff about how they keep children safe and spoke to pupils about their experiences.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders of the school, members of staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of trust and some directors. The lead inspector also met the governing body and some governors, and reviewed documentation relating to governance.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinator, spoke to pupils with SEND, reviewed plans to support these pupils and visited lessons to see how these pupils are supported to learn.
- Inspectors considered 605 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 342 free text comments. Inspectors also took account of 183 responses to the staff survey and 556 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sharon Cromie	Ofsted Inspector
Nicky Archer	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Bzikot	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Kearsley	Ofsted Inspector

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