

Wade Deacon High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111435
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	288960
Inspection date	14 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Leszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	1128
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Woodroofe
Headteacher	Mrs Pamela Wright
Date of previous school inspection	7 May 2001
School address	Birchfield Road Widnes Cheshire WA8 7TD
Telephone number	0151 4232721
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Wade Deacon is a mixed 11 to 16 comprehensive with 1,123 students on roll. It includes a specialist unit for hearing impaired students. The school is on a split site and is oversubscribed. The majority of students come from the immediate locality of the school and from a wide range of backgrounds, both advantaged and disadvantaged. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups. Attainment on entry is slightly above average overall, although this hides a wide spectrum of abilities. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is average. The number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average although the proportion with statements of special educational needs is average. Student mobility is low. Attendance is above the national average. The school is a specialist technology college and has mathematics and computing as additional specialisms.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wade Deacon is a good school with many outstanding aspects. The school has much to be proud of and an exciting future to look forward to. Students succeed at Wade Deacon both in terms of their learning and in their development as young adults. Overall, their examination results are very good and boys do particularly well. Specialist status has been used effectively to improve achievement and push up standards, particularly in technology and information and communication technology (ICT). Concerns remain about the poorer performance in the humanities and a relative decline in core subjects. The school's managers are aware of these issues and have put systems in place which are beginning to bear fruit. Good use is made of self-review to recognise successes and identify where things could be made even better.

Students enjoy coming to school and are keen to share their enthusiasm with their parents. 'He is keen to chat about the school day when he comes home.' was a parental comment which emphasised this point. The positive and welcoming climate evident around the school is also reflected in the comments made by students. They are proud of their school, feel safe, want to do well and recognise the investments made by the school on their behalf. They know how to stay healthy and enjoy the many opportunities to excel at sport. Many have dreams to score that try for Widnes, the winning goal at Anfield or sprint to that gold medal at the London Olympics. The school has raised their aspirations in other ways too: many want to continue in education after they leave and others have good skills to help them in the work place.

Students particularly enjoy and excel in those lessons where they can be practically involved and think for themselves. Where teachers take risks, they are imaginative in their teaching, use specialist support effectively and students respond positively. They are well behaved, even in those few lessons where they are not always challenged, where their work is not marked or where the teacher does all the talking. Students make particularly good use of the many opportunities for enrichment studies and working outside the classroom. Students who need additional help are well supported.

The school is well led and well managed. There is a strong emphasis on partnership and teamwork which was succinctly summarised by one parent who stated, 'I would like to think we are working as a team to provide the best possible education for my child.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that marking is regular, constructive and informative across all subjects.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good across the whole school.
- Ensure that faculties work in partnership with classroom assistants to make outcomes even more effective for learners.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's own judgement that standards and achievement are good overall with students making best progress in examination classes. The school regularly meets or exceeds its targets.

At Key Stage 3, despite a recent decline in the attainment of students in English, standards remain high in all core subjects. Students achieve well in mathematics and science but make

only satisfactory progress in English, where fewer students achieve the higher levels in particular. Boys' achievement is increasing more rapidly than the girls.

Most students are successful in their Key Stage 4 examination courses and many achieve well. Although standards remain high overall, there has been a slight dip in results in all three core subjects, particularly mathematics, in recent years. Specialist status has promoted high performance in technology and ICT and the strong emphasis the school places on sporting activity has had a positive impact on students' very good achievement in physical education. The school is concerned about the relative decline in standards in humanities subjects, particularly history and geography and has put systems in place to address this. The school supports boys well and overall they achieve better than girls.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They achieve far more than just reaching good academic standards. Through respect and setting high expectations, adults encourage them to give of their best. Students enjoy school and have very positive attitudes both to their lessons and school life in general. Attendance rates are above the national average. 'I've loved my five years here and I'm really going to miss it when I leave.' was a typical comment from a Year 11 student. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. They demonstrate a sound sense of right and wrong. They are respectful and work together harmoniously. They value the thought for the day which 'really makes us think about how we get on with other people'.

Students understand fully the importance of healthy lifestyles and healthy diets, even though a few still sneak a fizzy drink or packet of crisps into their lunchbox. Large numbers participate in the wide range of sporting activities provided by the school. Students feel safe in school. They are confident in approaching adults with concerns and are certain that swift and effective action will be taken in response. They really enjoy the opportunities they have to take on positions of responsibility, such as becoming buddies to Year 7 students to help them settle into their new school. The school council has the potential to become increasingly more effective in giving the students a role in developing the school by bringing about further improvements. A good example of what can be achieved is the installation of television screens around school to provide daily information and celebrate success. Students show real interest and youthful exuberance when they recognise themselves or friends illuminated on the 'big screen'. By the time they leave school students have developed into mature and confident young adults with all the necessary skills, both academic and social, to equip them very well for their future success.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall although inconsistencies remain in some parts of the school. Senior managers are aware of areas needing development and clear support strategies have been put into place where required. In most lessons, learners make good progress because teaching is well planned, lively and engaging. Sometimes, however, teachers give too much guidance rather than encouraging the students to think for themselves. In these lessons students are less engaged in their learning and make slower progress. Relationships are very

strong throughout the school. This ensures a positive atmosphere in lessons where students work well together and support each other. They respond well to the high expectations adults have of their behaviour and work rate. Most teachers use their good subject knowledge effectively to challenge students and help them build on previous learning. ICT is used skilfully by most teachers to add extra variety to teaching and support students' independent learning. In lessons observed, the effective deployment of classroom assistants was inconsistent in supporting students' progress. The quality of marking is also too inconsistent. In some areas it is exemplary but in too many it is neither frequent nor rigorous enough. It does not indicate clearly what students need to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school offers a balanced curriculum that meets statutory requirements and the needs of the greater majority of its students. Setting throughout the school supports learning and enables students to work in groups appropriate to their abilities. There are suitable time allocations for subjects apart from citizenship. This is delivered mainly through other subjects which makes it difficult to provide a cohesive experience for students. The heavy investment of time in sport at both key stages promotes students' healthy lifestyles well. Parental preferences encourage students to pursue traditional subject options. Most students are satisfied with the choices they are offered, although the school is aware that it needs to provide a wider range of vocational pathways to meet the needs of all individuals.

Students enjoy and benefit from the many opportunities provided through the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Both students and parents speak highly of the support offered through, for instance, after-school lessons and 'weekend breaks' to the contrasting environments of Tattenhall and Edinburgh, to study subjects such as art. Gifted and talented students are encouraged to develop their skills through a range of activities offered through Saturday morning enrichment sessions. Many students participate in the wide choice of after school sporting activities and enjoy many successes, especially on the rugby field. Parents are appreciative of the extra time invested by teachers which allows their youngsters to pursue interests in a 'sociable and safe atmosphere'.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and at the heart of all the school does. Procedures for safeguarding children are firmly embedded. Policies and procedures for ensuring health and safety are rigorous. Arrangements for students transferring from primary school are highly effective and help them settle in quickly. Similarly, older students speak very highly of the quality of advice they receive to guide them when they leave school. Rigorous procedures allow the early identification of vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Adults in the guidance centre and learning mentors do outstanding work in supporting those individuals with a range of behavioural and emotional needs. One student commented appreciatively, 'The mentors have changed the way I view school. I used to hate it but now I realise how much everyone wants me to succeed.' The school works very effectively with a wide range of outside agencies to support vulnerable students. Systems for monitoring their progress are highly effective. They allow any underachievement to be identified quickly and supportive action to be taken to tackle it.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding overall. The headteacher provides exceptional direction and works well in partnership with her senior colleagues in creating a strong, forward-looking team. There is a very clear vision for the school's future and this is shared with governors, teachers, parents and students. Parents are particularly appreciative of the caring ethos that has been created to make their children feel safe, secure and challenged. There is mutual trust and as one parent explained, 'For us, the school is an extension of home.'

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection in meeting the many challenges faced in its journey towards becoming a real centre of excellence. Senior managers know the school well and have a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses. The very effective monitoring programme provides a good baseline for further improvements in the classroom. Innovation is encouraged and support is readily given to those areas which need it. The departmental self-review is rigorous and is used effectively by most subject leaders to analyse progress and plan for further improvement.

Funding invested in leadership training is beginning to bear fruit in the increasing confidence and impact of management at all levels.

Governance is now very good and has improved since the last inspection. Governors now play a more active role in the leadership of the school. The school provides very good value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

I enjoyed visiting your school recently and would like to thank you for all your help. You are rightly proud of your school and are very appreciative of the way the staff work hard to make your time there an enjoyable and successful experience. I was very impressed with your maturity, politeness and great sense of fun, as well as the confident way you were able to articulate your views and opinions. You provided me with a great deal of useful information about the school.

Yours is a very good and successful school. The teachers and especially your parents are very proud of your achievements, whether these are in the exam room or on the sports field. You look fit and healthy and are clearly benefiting from the many opportunities to play sports and the healthy food options in your school canteen, although one or two of you still try to hoodwink your teachers by sneaking crisps or fizzy drinks into your lunchboxes!

You particularly enjoy those lessons which are practical, challenging and allow you to develop and use a range of skills. Over the coming months your teachers will be working hard to continue to make your lessons even more interesting and enjoyable. You also need to do your bit and try a little harder, especially in mathematics, history and geography.

I was very pleased to hear that many of you will be sad to leave the school when you reach sixteen, it shows that the school is a 'special' place for you. I was equally delighted that many of you have clear plans about what you wish to achieve in life and what you want to be. Your dreams are worth working for and I look forward to hearing how you scored that try for Widnes, that winning goal at Anfield or achieved that place at university which your hard work deserves. A few of you want to become teachers, which also shows what good role models your current teachers are.