

The Wey Valley School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 113879 |
| Local Authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 289755 |
| Inspection dates | 7–8 November 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Ian Stuart |

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

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|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1037 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Diana Day |
| Headteacher | Phil Thomas |
| Date of previous school inspection | 10 December 2001 |
| School address | Dorchester Road Weymouth DT3 5AN |
| Telephone number | 01305 817000 |
| Fax number | 01305 815851 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wey Valley School is slightly larger than most secondary schools. Its students come from a wide range of backgrounds, with a higher than average proportion from relatively disadvantaged circumstances. Most are of White British origin, although there is a small but growing number whose first language is not English. The school became a specialist Sports College in 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wey Valley is a good and rapidly improving school with some outstanding features. In recent years, it has not made as much progress as might be expected because it has taken time to build up sufficient capacity to implement necessary changes 'to turn the ship around'. However, many factors are now contributing to this rapid improvement. These include the significant strengthening of the leadership team at senior and middle levels and major improvements to the curriculum. There are also very effective systems to monitor students' progress and take action when needed. Sports College status is having a major and positive impact, as are exemplary links with other professionals outside the school. Furthermore, there is a growing pride in the school held by staff and students which is giving an additional impetus to recent progress. All these factors also give the school a continuing ability to improve along the course it is set upon. Much of the credit for the accelerating pace of improvement is due to the headteacher, very ably supported by his senior team. He has given clear direction and vision for the school which is firmly based on the rounded development of the whole person. Governors and many able middle leaders also contribute strongly to the good way the school is led and managed. Outstanding care, guidance and support enable students to make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community through, for example, the school council. Students' good personal development and well-being are illustrated by their feeling safe and healthy and their extensive participation in the many opportunities open to them. Although students report pockets of unsocial behaviour, most of them behave responsibly and well, showing good humour and friendliness. This is a marked improvement from the judgement of unsatisfactory behaviour at the time of the previous inspection.

The school recognises that there is some way to go before all teaching matches the best, and evidence from the inspection bears out the school's accurate self-evaluation of the quality of teaching. Both teaching and learning are now good, with a range from satisfactory to outstanding. Improved teaching has been a vital ingredient in raising achievement and the key objective of the school's development plan has been correctly identified as further developing strategies to enhance teaching. The much improved curriculum, with its very good mix of academic and vocational courses, and the excellent help students receive related to their progress are also vitally important aspects of motivating students and improving their standards.

In recent years, standards have been a little below national levels with generally satisfactory achievement by students. However, achievement is good. Students are now doing better in Years 10 and 11 as a result of the school's much improved provision. All indicators from present work and the school's accurate and thorough performance information point to rising standards which, overall, are now matching national averages. But, although most groups are doing well, some older girls are held back by their low aspirations. Opportunities are not always fully exploited to extend the learning and study skills of the most able students.

Most students and parents are very supportive of the school, with a recurring theme in their comments being the progress the school is now making. The relatively few concerns that were expressed have been shared with the school but a more typical view came from parents whose third child is now in the school. They wrote very encouragingly: 'We have seen many changes and all for the better. The staff and 95% of the students need huge praise which we gladly give'. After many difficulties, the school appears to have a bright future ahead of it. Nearly all its students are developing into fine young people well equipped to play their full role economically and socially as citizens of the twenty-first century.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure, through the sharing of good practice, that all teaching is up to the quality of the best
- improve the achievement of girls, raising their own aspirations of how well they can do
- build on existing good practice in physical education, to plan more effectively for more able students and encourage their independent study skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' attainment on entry covers the full range of ability but overall is slightly below average and much lower with the larger than average number of students joining the school in Years 10 and 11. Standards on leaving in recent years have been below the national average, with students' achievement satisfactory. Students have tended to make better progress in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. However, in the 2007 results, this pattern was reversed. The good achievement of most of this group of students, and of the present Years 10 and 11, reflects the effectiveness of curriculum changes and the thoroughness of present systems to track students' progress and implement intervention strategies when necessary. The marked improvement is more noticeable with boys than girls and, unlike many schools, boys are achieving better than girls. The school has devised a number of schemes to support the minority of girls whose aspirations are too limited but, as yet, these have not had a full effect. Good progress is now evident throughout the school. Very challenging targets have been set for the present Year 11. There is convincing evidence from current work and the school's own analysis that students are on track to meet these targets because they are being very well supported by their teachers. Speaking very positively of her teachers, one Year 11 student said, 'they are really pushing you'. Students who need special help with their learning, including those whose first language is not English and those with disabilities, are making good progress. Whilst the most gifted and talented are doing well, and exceptionally well in areas such as physical education, their independent study skills are not always fully developed to extend them to their maximum potential.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students enjoy school and are keen to learn. Levels of attendance have improved and are now similar to the national average. Behaviour both in lessons and around the school is good. Students believe that behaviour has improved considerably, although they and some parents have concerns about a small minority of students. Students say they are safe because bullying is rare and nearly always dealt with effectively, with peer mediators and 'buddies' complementing the good staff procedures. Students respond well when given opportunities to use their initiative. For example, a thriving school council and the Year 11 'senate' are strong forces, and some students are actively involved in planning and delivering the Anti-Bullying Week for later this term. They appreciate the school's messages about a healthy lifestyle and many take advantage of the healthy food choices on offer to them. Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Students benefit from a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and take good opportunities to become involved in visits both in this country and as far afield as India. Students make an outstanding contribution to the community with many involved in fundraising, as mentors, sports leaders or community volunteers, and a number work actively with the innovative Wey Valley radio. Along with sound

literacy and numeracy skills and good computing skills, students are developing further good skills to help them prepare for their future economic well-being. They benefit from a very comprehensive programme of enterprise and work-related activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students learn well and show good attitudes to their work because of effective teaching. Students responded positively to their teachers and behaved well in all of the lessons observed during the inspection. Teachers have good subject knowledge and structure their lessons successfully, using different styles of teaching and learning which engage all groups of learners and encourage them to work independently. Although teaching is good overall and some is outstanding, it is not consistently good. Satisfactory teaching does not match the best because it lacks pace and challenge. Where this occurs, learning is routine and progress mundane. The more able and talented students are sufficiently stretched in most subjects but are less challenged in others. The strategies adopted in the physical education department to identify and extend the more able students provide a model of good practice.

Present assessment procedures are now a powerful tool for teachers in their teaching and students in their learning. Assessment is accurate and thorough, with monthly information feeding into reports and individual reviews for each student. This informs teachers so that they are able to tailor work to the full range of students' needs as well as guiding students to assess their own performance. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well tracked and supported so that they make good progress over time. Teaching assistants and a wide variety of resources are effectively used to support learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The broad curriculum has some outstanding elements that motivate students so that they are enthusiastic and keen to learn. It is better matched to students' differing needs than it was at the time of the previous inspection. There is significant provision of vocational and work-related courses, many of which are highly relevant to the local employment situation. The effective mix of courses gives substantial flexibility to meet individual circumstances and to help raise most students' aspirations. This is enhanced by the very good collaborative arrangements with colleges and other schools. There is good capacity for further improvements, with active planning in place for the introduction for a new Diploma course in 2008. The range of provision for physical education and sports-related courses is excellent. This contributes greatly to raising students' confidence and leadership skills. Activities that enrich the curriculum are strong and provide very good opportunities to participate and take on responsibilities. They are enjoyed by large numbers of students. Prominent amongst these are large-scale school productions and residential visits such as the highly regarded week for Year 7 students on Dartmoor.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Child safeguarding procedures are comprehensive and consistently applied across every aspect of school life. There are some excellent practices. For example, all staff carry a child protection document with their identity card so that they can respond quickly and correctly should the

need arise. Students know whom to turn to if they have problems and feel confident that they will get help. Guidance arrangements are particularly impressive, with performance information extremely well used. This ensures that teachers can closely track an individual's progress and identify any opportunities to provide additional support. Students are aware of personal targets and appreciate the regular focused monitoring sessions with their tutors that help most of them to reach their full potential. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good and this, together with active systems to promote attendance, ensures that vulnerable students make good progress. The school's partnerships with outside agencies are outstanding, with exemplary multi-agency cooperation with colleagues in the health and social services professions working for the benefit of students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, very well supported by a skilled senior leadership team, is providing excellent direction for the work of the school. His vision is based on a very clear and accurate analysis of the needs of the school's students. It is well shared by the staff and informs every aspect of school life. Over a number of years, he and the governors have steadily recruited and trained staff to provide the capacity to deliver the rapid improvements that are now taking effect. The evaluation of the school's performance is detailed and shared by all key managers and staff. As a result, senior managers and governors have a very sharp understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and planning to improve is well focused. The school is using challenging targets very effectively with students as a strategy to raise standards. At middle management level, there are many strong leaders, but there is some variability in effectiveness. Consequently, there is still some way to go before all aspects of the school's performance matches its best. However, leaders have successfully fostered a sense of optimism and confidence within the whole school community that provides a good base for further progress. Furthermore, specialist sports status has played an important role in developing the ethos and standards in the school, particularly through the opportunities for students to build self-confidence and leadership skills.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|

Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| 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? | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| 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 |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Students

Inspection of The Wey Valley School, Weymouth, DT3 5AN.

- It was a pleasure to visit your school and meet many of you. Thank you very much for your help and friendliness. We think Wey Valley is a good and rapidly improving school with some outstanding features. We are very pleased that most of you feel the same and acknowledge that improvement has taken place not only in the work in lessons but in important areas such as behaviour and in the many opportunities open to you outside lessons. Because of these improvements, most of you are achieving well and making good progress, with overall standards rising to national averages.
- It has taken some time for the benefits of several years of good planning by your headteacher, staff and governors to become clear. We can see that the school is well placed to improve further. With your help, it will. Let me give you one example: although most girls are doing well, if you take the overall results of the school, boys are achieving better than girls. There is a challenge here to some girls who need to be a bit more ambitious about their futures and to work more closely with their teachers to see how education can help them more effectively. Although there is still room for some improvement, much teaching is good or better. The curriculum is good, with valuable opportunities available for everyone, including college courses for older students. So there are no excuses not to do well – boys and girls alike!

We are very impressed by the care, support and guidance you receive. This results in your progress being carefully watched and action taken to help you, and, if you encounter difficulties, high quality support is available. A fine feature of the school is the way many of you are able to take responsibilities around school in things such as the school council, leaders' courses or even interviewing me on Wey Valley Radio! The school's status as a Sports College has also brought many benefits.

- So if the school is doing well under the very strong leadership of your headteacher, how can it do even better? As well raising the ambitions of some girls, we are asking the school to look particularly at two other areas:
 - helping teachers to make all teaching as good as the best that is already on offer
 - encouraging those of you who have particular talents and strengths to take your learning even higher and develop further your independent learning skills.

You have every right to be proud of your school and nearly all of you are a credit to the school and yourselves. I send my best wishes to all of you.

Yours sincerely, Ian Stuart, Lead Inspector