



William Edwards School and Sports College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115354
Local Authority THURROCK
Inspection number 290216
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Stephen Abbott HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	College address	Stifford Clays Road
School category	Community		Stifford Clays, Grays
Age range of pupils	11–16		Essex RM16 3NJ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01375 486000
Number on roll (college)	1190	Fax number	01375 486009
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr M Baker
		Headteacher	Mr J King
Date of previous college inspection	26 November 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	21–22 February 2007	290216

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the college

William Edwards School and Sports College became a specialist sports college in September 2003 and a training school a year later. In September 2006, it entered an arrangement with another, successful, local school to share its headteacher. The school holds the Healthy Schools Award, Sports Mark and the Basic Skills Quality Mark and is an Investor in People.

On average, the students joining the school are close to or a little below the nationally expected standards. There are four boys for every three girls in the school. The number of pupils with minority ethnic heritage and the proportion whose first language is not English, are both well below average. Just over one in five pupils has learning difficulties or disabilities. This is a little above the national average, as is the proportion with statements of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is about half the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the college

Grade: 2

William Edwards School and Sports College is improving rapidly and is now a good school. There are two key factors in this improvement. One is the way teachers prepare students for examinations, contributing to the record GCSE results in 2006. This is largely due to separate developments at departmental level. The second and critical factor is the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, who has galvanised the entire staff. He has empowered senior and middle leaders to be creative. The school's capacity to improve and the quality of monitoring and evaluation are now good. Leadership and management are much more focused on improving the standards and well-being of all students. They have been strengthened through good external support, effective line management and carefully targeted coaching for leaders.

The school has run a high-profile campaign to root out disruptive behaviour and bullying. Importantly, the students told inspectors how much better the school had become, how much more they now enjoyed learning and how the student councils allow their views to be heard. They were helpful and polite, and behaved well during the inspection. Staff and many parents also commented on significant recent improvements. Although communication with parents has improved, recently established protocols are not consistently followed and some parents continue to experience frustration when contacting the school.

Students' personal development is good and benefits from the mixed-age tutor groups. They are increasingly well prepared for further learning and the world of work. As a Sports College, the school helps them to lead healthy lifestyles and offers many opportunities to contribute to the community, including sports coaching and peer mentoring. The exciting cross-curricular Heritage Project attracted significant local and national interest.

Students' achievement is good. Standards are now above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and broadly average at the end of Key Stage 4. However, the students now in year 11 and those responsible for the record GCSE results in 2006 had been below average at age 14. This illustrates how progress has improved to good in the last two years. This improvement is being sustained by the well organised tracking of students' progress and early intervention to tackle signs of underachievement. Day-to-day teaching and learning are satisfactory but good care, guidance and support enables many students to achieve challenging targets. The best teaching develops collaborative learning and initiative but pockets of unsatisfactory teaching remain. Many teachers are still developing their skills but initiatives to improve teaching and learning are beginning to have an impact. This is seen for example in the improving use of assessment by most teachers to meet students' individual needs. The present curriculum is satisfactory but overloaded at Key Stage 4 and insufficiently flexible. It is being revised for September with the full support of all departments and in partnership with local colleges.

The inspection took note of some strongly expressed parental concerns, many long established, about behaviour, bullying and communication and balanced these against

the extraordinary impact of the new headteacher. It is the high quality of self-evaluation and consequent action that has enabled so much progress in a short time. There is no complacency; the school is well aware that it has many more improvements to make, including regaining the trust of some parents. It therefore assessed itself as satisfactory, but inspectors found that many aspects are now good; compelling evidence that it is effective overall.

What the college should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching so students are less reliant on intervention and booster programmes to reach their targets.
- Ensure that all communication with parents follows the school's recently established protocol and meets high quality standards.
- Improve the quality of the curriculum by implementing the planned changes and ensuring that it continues to meet the differing needs of all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement has improved considerably in the last two years and is now good overall. GCSE results were the best ever for the school in 2006. The school sets challenging targets that are increasingly being met. The standards reached by students currently in Key Stage 4 and in the 2006 GCSE examinations are at the national average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above average overall. They are broadly average in mathematics and science but particularly good in English. When these students joined the school in Year 7, their attainment was below the national average.

Progress is outstanding in English and good overall in Key Stage 3; boys in particular achieve well. Students make good progress in Key Stage 4, especially in mathematics and science. This is partly a result of the increasingly effective monitoring of students' work and good preparation for the examinations. Achievement in the wider sense of preparing students well for the future is improving as the school places a greater emphasis on developing understanding and collaborative working. The progress of students with learning difficulties and disabilities has improved following a restructuring of learning support, and is now good. Most students on the alternative education programmes achieve a vocational qualification.

Inspection evidence and monitoring records for current students show that good progress is being maintained and standards are broadly average. However, there has been limited improvement in design and technology and modern foreign languages, two of the weaker areas mentioned in the last report. In a minority of less effective lessons, the slow pace reduces the quality of learning.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students are proud of their school and enjoy being a part of its life. They participate well in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport. Their attitudes towards each other and to adults are good. During the inspection, students were considerate and well behaved in the corridors and outdoor areas. In lessons, their attitudes and behaviour were good overall. Staff and students were in agreement that behaviour has improved considerably this year. However, a legacy of parental concerns remains. More than a quarter of the 500 parents who returned questionnaires were concerned about behaviour, with several specifically mentioning either disruptions in lessons or bullying. Students explained to inspectors that the new headteacher had brought about major changes, and that disruption and bullying are taken very seriously. Low level disruption was evident in a small minority of lessons where teaching was ineffective.

Students' spiritual, cultural, moral and social development is good. Assemblies play an important role in this, especially through the celebration of success. Students can make a positive contribution to their community in many ways. Older pupils develop leadership qualities by working with younger pupils in their mixed age tutor groups, as 'PALS' (Pupils as Listeners) or as prefects. The tutor, house and school councils feature strongly in the life of the school. Students report that these bodies have real power in making decisions and effecting change. Students also recognise the needs of others in the local, national and global communities through fund-raising activities. They also learn how to stay healthy and safe. Students' future economic well-being is promoted well through work experience and various enrichment activities and through improving standards in English and mathematics.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's view that teaching and learning are satisfactory with some good features, but not consistent enough. About half of the lessons are good and a few are outstanding. In good lessons, purposeful student activity is emphasised and teachers use assessment well to guide teaching and learning. Digital projectors are used extensively and usually have a positive impact on students' learning. Most lessons are at least satisfactory because teachers plan lessons well, with clear learning objectives which they explain and discuss with students. In the few cases where students do not adequately understand what they are supposed to learn, their progress is inhibited. The school is working hard to eradicate the minority of inadequate lessons. These are characterised by a slow pace and unchallenging activities because planning is less focused on what and how students will learn. Students' attitudes deteriorate and behaviour management is both more obtrusive and less effective.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and frequently make good progress, but the most able students are not always challenged sufficiently to work to their full potential. Recent improvements in standards and achievement are partly due to good academic support and are not fully reflected in the quality of teaching. The school rightly wants teaching to focus more on developing students' understanding and their ability to apply their knowledge, believing this will raise achievement further.

Most students are involved in assessing their own learning. In many lessons they know what attainment level or grade they are working at because their learning is well supported by diagnostic marking and constructive comments. However, marking is variable and some consists of little more than ticks and, on occasion, not even that.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements but the school recognises its weaknesses. For example, there are insufficient opportunities for students to take vocational courses at Key Stage 4. Also, students are taking too many GCSE courses to do them all justice and many feel overloaded. The school has already taken steps to revise the curriculum from September 2007 to be more relevant and flexible to better meet the needs of every student. The revised curriculum is also more responsive to community and employer needs.

Provision for information and communication technology has improved since it was criticised in the last inspection. Students acknowledge this as helpful and motivational. A variety of opportunities is provided for students to develop enterprise and financial skills and to work in teams but this requires further development at Key Stage 3. Citizenship provision is effectively delivered through a mixture of dedicated lessons and well-coordinated contributions from other subjects. There is a well-led alternative programme that motivates students through work-related learning and college-based accredited vocational courses. Finally, the curriculum is enriched by a wide range of well-attended extra-curricular activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Arrangements for care, guidance and support are good. The needs of vulnerable students and looked after children are managed well; tutors are provided with training and external professional support is sought where appropriate. Child protection procedures are robust and clear. The Special Educational Needs department is well managed and the use of teaching assistants across a range of subjects has a positive impact. Good relationships are fostered with local feeder schools enabling effective induction, further enhanced by the vertical tutor group system. Individual students with particular needs are identified at an early stage and strategies tailored individually to enable success. Reduced timetables that focus on fewer subjects are arranged for some older students. Support for these students is satisfactory overall but a small

proportion of their parents were concerned that work set in the retained subjects did not always fill the time released.

There is a promising, recently-established system to set challenging targets and track students' progress towards them. This information allows the school to identify and intervene effectively with those needing more support and guidance. Students are aware of how to improve their academic standards and they appreciate the time their teachers give to support them outside lessons. There is good monitoring and support for those on alternative programmes. Non-teaching pastoral managers liaise well with tutors, teachers, parents and external agencies. Support from the Connexions service is good. Links with local Further Education Colleges are strong and students are well informed about their future options. The 'C2U' centre on site utilises the skills of local health care professionals to enhance the advice and guidance for students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The recently appointed headteacher provides outstanding and inspirational leadership, giving the school a very clear direction for the future. He is driving forward important initiatives and bringing about a significant change to the school culture with a high profile campaign to tackle problems with behaviour, bullying and communication. While a significant minority of parents are still concerned about these matters, most are supportive of the school and many echo the parent who wrote, 'I am impressed with the reforms which the new headteacher has made... the school is on an upward path'.

The school's self-evaluation is thorough. Governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide satisfactory support and challenge. The headteacher has successfully established with staff what needs to be done to improve the school. Senior and middle leaders have clear areas of responsibility, supported by coaching to develop their skills. They are empowered to use their initiative and creativity to make improvements on the understanding that they are accountable for improving outcomes for students. All teachers have been trained in lesson observation and new systems have been introduced for monitoring and evaluation. At present, evaluation is not always focused enough on the quality of learning, but the new systems are already bringing about improvements.

The school provides sound value for money. Outcomes are good but the budget is in deficit, though staff re-structuring and re-deployment have helped to reduce costs. The Sports College building programme has brought dance and drama facilities, a fitness suite and multi-use games area, but much of the other accommodation needs refurbishment.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	College 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 college work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness of the college's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
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	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 behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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.

Leadership and management

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 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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this college require special measures?	No
Does this college require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 February 2007

William Edwards School and Sports College, Stifford Clays Road, Grays, RM16 3NJ

Dear Students

I am writing to tell you the results of your school's inspection. Before I do that, I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your co-operation and help during our visit. You played a vital role in the inspection. We were a bit puzzled because several parents told us how worried they were about bullying and disruptive behaviour in lessons, but we saw mostly good and courteous behaviour. You explained to us how Mr King had confronted these problems and had made you feel that your views mattered. You said that the school was much better this year. We were impressed by the way in which you now support each other in the vertical tutor groups. The problems haven't completely gone away, but you feel much more confident that they will be dealt with properly.

The inspection team judged that you have a good school for two main reasons. One is the improvement in the standard of your work, which shows that you make good progress. The other was the outstanding leadership of the school. Mr King is very good at getting the best out of people and he is well supported by Mr Henderson, Ms Kaur and everyone else involved in the school. Good care, guidance and support enable many of you to achieve well. Teachers have shown you how to use what you know and understand to get better marks, so results have improved. The best lessons give you useful life skills, a deeper understanding of ideas and the confidence to apply what you have learnt. However, some lessons were a bit slow and you were not always clear what you were learning. We think the school will be able get even better because your teachers are constantly looking for ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The inspection team suggested three things that the school needs to get right to make sure that it keeps up the good work

One is for the school is to make sure that good teaching happens consistently. Another is to reduce the number of GCSEs that you take and to provide different learning pathways in Key Stage 4 to fit better with your individual needs and interests. As some of you will know, the school is already working on this for next year. The third change we asked for is to improve communication with your parents and to deal with their concerns better. Mr King has introduced sensible guidelines but staff do not always remember to follow them.

The school agrees with our priorities for improvement. Everyone in the school is well aware that there are many other improvements that can be made. This report is a vote of confidence in the school. It is now up to you to show just how good you can get.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott,

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools