

Wheatley Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123243
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	292624
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1190
6th form	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Helen Stradling
Headteacher	Ms Kate Curtis
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2003
School address	Holton Oxford OX33 1QH
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Wheatley Park is a larger than average mixed comprehensive school. Students' attainment on entry is slightly above average. The majority of students are White British and the proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with additional learning needs is around average. The school gained specialist status in media arts in 2000. The headteacher took up post in January 2005 and there have been some significant changes within the senior leadership team over the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Wheatley Park School provides satisfactory education for its students in Years 7 to 11 and good education in the sixth form. Parents, teachers and students have commented on the improvements in the school over the last two years, brought about by the strong leadership of the headteacher. She is ably supported by the other senior leaders and staff across the school. The school rightly identified that, in 2005 and 2006, students were not making sufficient progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11. There has been a clear focus on raising standards and achievement since then. Improvement strategies implemented over the last two years are proving effective and students are now making satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 11 and good progress in the sixth form. Students' behaviour has improved, and although a few still cause some disruption in lessons, students generally have a more positive attitude to learning and the majority enjoy school. Students say they feel safe in school and any incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Many are actively involved in a range of activities in the school and wider community. The school's specialist status in media arts provides exciting opportunities for students to contribute to this, as well as developing their own creative and cultural skills, for example, through the international film festival, organised by media students and this year's play writing festival. Many students also take active roles as mentors within the school as well as working with other local schools and community groups.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, though there is still some variation in the quality of lessons and in teachers' ability to manage disruptive behaviour where it occurs. The best teaching engages students, inspires them to learn and helps them to make good progress. In weaker lessons, teachers do not always plan appropriate tasks to meet the needs and interests of all students, and in those lessons, the more able are often not sufficiently challenged and stretched. Teaching in the sixth form is good, where knowledgeable subject specialists support students in making good progress and developing independent learning skills.

The curriculum is good and offers students a wide range of choices in Years 10 and 11, and a good range of AS and A-level subjects in the sixth form. The range of vocational courses is growing for students in Years 10 and 11, and for those taking level 2 courses in the sixth form, but vocational provision for level 3 courses is limited. There are firm plans in place to increase the vocational provision through collaboration with local schools and colleges.

Pastoral care is good and students speak positively of the help and support they get, for example, with personal issues and career information to help them make appropriate choices for further study or employment. Productive partnerships with external agencies provide further support for students. Academic guidance and support is developing, but tutors say they need to develop their own skills and confidence further to be fully effective in helping students improve.

Honest self-evaluation provides senior staff and governors with a good understanding of the schools' strengths and weaknesses, and these are reflected in the key priorities identified for improvement. The improved use of performance data has enabled the school to implement appropriate improvement strategies and monitor their effectiveness. The school has a realistic view of the improvements made so far, and acknowledges that there are still further improvements to be made. Inspectors agreed with much of the school's self-evaluation and the school's capacity to improve further is good.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the sixth form is good. Students speak very positively about their experiences and how the good teaching and support they receive helps them to do well. Students' enjoyment of school is enhanced by their participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. A large number make very positive contributions to the school and wider community, for example, through participating in mentoring schemes and community events.

Standards are good, and students make good progress, particularly in year 13. In 2006, pass rates were high in A-level subjects and satisfactory for AS-level courses. In-year monitoring data demonstrates improving achievement on AS-level courses. The numbers of students completing level 2 courses has increased.

Much good teaching enables students to achieve well. Subject teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Lessons are well planned and teachers check students' understanding through effective use of questioning.

Good careers guidance and support enables students to make appropriate career choices. A high proportion of students continue to higher education or employment and training when they leave school. All students have a personal tutor who reviews their progress towards achievement targets. However, the approach to tutorials is not consistent across the 6th form and the quality of students' experiences is variable.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the improvements already evident in student achievement to raise standards further.
- Improve the proportion of good and better teaching by ensuring the needs and interests of all students are met.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are now broadly average. In 2006, the results of tests in year 9 showed that students had made satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 and good progress in mathematics. However, GCSE results were below the national average and students' progress was inadequate. Although the proportion of students achieving 5 or more GCSEs at A*-C had risen since 2005, it remained below the national average. Average point scores in English and mathematics also improved in 2006 and were also just below average. This year, students in Years 7 to 9 continue to make satisfactory progress and there has been a clear improvement in standards in Years 10 and 11 and achievement is now satisfactory.

There is clear evidence that more consistent intervention strategies to support students who are failing to meet their targets are having an impact. The school's focus on raising standards

and improving teaching and learning is beginning to improve standards. Most students are now aware of their targets and, in Year 11 particularly, are aware of what is required to improve.

The 2006 results showed that many students with learning difficulties had not made enough progress during Years 10 and 11. There has been a clear improvement this year and these students are now making satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy school and show respect for each other. Behaviour is improving and is now satisfactory although there are still pockets of disruptive behaviour, which have a negative effect on learning in a few lessons. Their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good. Students are keen to be involved in the school's wide range of activities, many of which reflect the school's media arts specialist status. The school has worked hard to improve attendance and punctuality which is now satisfactory. 'There has been a change in the school culture and behaviour has improved' commented a student. Students also note that 'there is now a better atmosphere for learning'.

Younger students welcome the support of 'senior students' and mentors who they feel confident to contact if they have concerns. An innovative programme of sex and relations education (SRE) equips students with the skills to make informed decisions. This enables them to make appropriate option choices and to consider their future economic well-being. Students are proud of their involvement with the Eco-school initiative. Provision to enable students to adopt a healthy lifestyle is good. Consequently, emotional health and well-being are a strength. Students' participation in sporting activities is high. They take fund-raising events very seriously and help raise considerable sums of money for good causes, both at home and abroad.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors confirmed the school's own judgement that teaching is satisfactory. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to occasionally inadequate, and the school is rightly focussing on improving the overall quality of teaching.

In the best lessons students make good progress, learn effectively and achieve well. They are engaged in their learning because the class teacher has prepared well, has good relationships with students and creates a stimulating learning environment through providing a range of interesting activities. Teachers use their good subject knowledge and effective questioning techniques to develop students' knowledge and check their understanding.

When teaching was not so good, behaviour of students slowed progress and planning was weak. In these lessons pace was slow and students, particularly the more able ones, were not sufficiently challenged. There were also inconsistencies in the use of marking and assessment. Whilst most students have a clear idea of their target grades, some do not know what is required to improve these grades. Many teachers do not use assessment information effectively to set students clear targets for improvement.

Students with learning difficulties are identified and the response of teachers in lessons ensures appropriate progress. Teaching assistants were effective in supporting students with learning difficulties in lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good throughout the school. Good liaison with feeder primary schools ensures a smooth transition to a broad and varied curriculum at Key Stage 3 and statutory requirements are met. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 has been extended to include a good range of pathways tailored to meet students' differing needs and aspirations. A significant number of students follow alternative curriculum routes, including vocational courses at a local college, which enables them to achieve well. A suitable range of modern foreign language GCSEs are on offer but participation remains low.

The impact of the specialist media arts status can be seen across the school. All students take an arts option in Years 10 and 11, and a good range of exciting and interesting projects involve many students in the school, as well as feeder primary schools, other secondary schools and community groups. Arts staff have recently undertaken curriculum training with other subject staff, to encourage and develop greater creativity in approach.

An innovative and creative programme of SRE, citizenship and work-related learning enables students to develop skills to support their transition to higher level study or employment. Enterprise skills are developed through activities such as a 'Dragons Den' event and enterprise days. Students rightly say, 'the trips out we make are superb'. These and the growing number of well attended clubs contribute much to students' enjoyment of school and their personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Students value the tutorial system, which contributes to an increasingly 'family-like' community in the school. Students say that this reduces any bullying, which is dealt with in a very 'understanding way'. Most students say they feel safe in school, supported by the high levels of supervision throughout the day. Good links with external agencies ensure that vulnerable students are well cared for. Careers advice and support are good and students are well informed about the options available to them for the next stage of education and working life.

Systematic whole-school procedures now check on students' academic progress. A range of intervention strategies are in place to tackle underachievement, and are having a positive effect on students' progress. However, tutors' guidance for students on what level they are working at and how they can improve has not yet had sufficient time to be fully effective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Improvement strategies introduced by the headteacher over the last two years are having a positive effect on improving behaviour and the ethos of the school, raising standards and on staff motivation and commitment. She is supported by a senior team, which, having undergone a number of recent changes, is now developing into a cohesive team.

Under her direction, senior and middle leaders evaluate each faculty's performance and monitor improvement. Accurate self-assessment is helping to bring about improvements. Teaching and learning is monitored regularly and support provided where necessary but this has not yet succeeded in raising the teaching standards in all lessons.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are very supportive of the improvements that are taking place. They are involved in strategic planning and act as "critical friends", challenging and supporting the school. Finances are well managed and in the context of satisfactory student achievement, value for money is satisfactory. Some school buildings are no longer fit for purpose and plans are in place for substantial new development to improve the quality of some accommodation.

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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	16-19
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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?	3	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
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	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

10 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Wheatley Park School, Holton, Oxford, OX33 1QH

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for making us so welcome and helping us with the inspection. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you, in your lessons and around the school. Many of you and your parents told us about the improvements which have taken place in the school over the last two years. We have taken these views into account in arriving at our judgement and we pleased to say that we agree that the school is improving and that all students are now making at least satisfactory progress.

The main points are:

- students in Years 10 and 11 are now making better progress and standards are improving
- sixth form students make good progress and achieve well
- behaviour is improving, but some students still misbehave in lessons and this disrupts the learning of others
- the quality of teaching varies, but the best teaching inspires you to learn and helps you achieve well
- there is a good range of courses and after-school activities, which many of you join, and these add to your enjoyment of school
- the specialist status in media arts provides many opportunities for you to join in school and community events and you participate enthusiastically
- the strong leadership of the headteacher has helped to bring about many improvements in the last two years.

We have asked the school to do two things to improve standards further:

- build on the improvements already evident in student achievement to raise standards further
- improve the proportion of good and better teaching by ensuring the needs and interests of all students are met.

With best wishes for the future

Janet Mercer Her Majesty's Inspector