

Lord Williams's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123268
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	292629
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Cathie Munt HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	2097
6th form	452
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr A Clarke
Headteacher	Mr D Wybron
Date of previous school inspection	4 November 2002
School address	Oxford Road Thame OX9 2AQ
Telephone number	01844 210510
Fax number	01844 261382

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Inspection number	292629

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

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

Description of the school

This very large comprehensive school on two sites in a market town serves students from the immediate locality and from the neighbouring local authority. Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average. A training school since 2001, it works closely in partnership with Higher Education colleges and local schools. It acquired Sports College status initially in 2001 and achieved re-designation, with information and communication technology (ICT) as a linked department, in March 2006. Lord Williams's School has acquired Investors in People status among other local and national awards. The Chinnor Resource Unit (CRU) provides accommodation and teaching for up to 25 students with autism and/or Asperger's syndrome. Innovative timetabling enables staff to teach on both sites. New accommodation for science is being built on the upper school site. The headteacher and most of the senior leadership team (SLT) were appointed in acting roles in September 2005. Their posts were confirmed as permanent in spring 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Lord Williams's is a good school with outstanding features. Prime among these are the range of academic and vocational courses in the sixth form and the extra-curricular activities throughout the school. The leadership and management of the sports college, the positive impact of the school's specialist status on motivating students and improving standards and the wide range of very effective partnerships with schools, colleges, sports clubs and other agencies are also outstanding features. The management team enjoys the support of staff, parents and governors. Parents report that the school is most effective in helping their children to settle in Year 7. They appreciate the assistance that teachers and other staff provide to students who experience difficulties of any sort during their time in school. A letter from the parents' association reflects the views expressed in many of the questionnaires when it says that this 'is a caring and supportive school'. The great majority of students behave sensibly in lessons and when moving around the buildings and vast grounds. They say that they feel safe in school. Guidance on subject choices and future courses is good. A large number of students apply to enter the sixth form and most remain to complete their courses successfully.

Standards, generally, are above those found nationally and this represents good progress in the students' learning. There have been notable successes in mathematics and science results recently, but standards in English have been more variable. Staff are working well to improve standards further and to eradicate pockets of underachievement by boys. Very effective provision is made for autistic students and they make good progress in their learning. However, the accommodation for these students, especially in the lower school, is inadequate to meet their personal and social needs.

Teaching is good overall with examples of outstanding practice across the school and in a variety of departments. Tutors and students applaud the more systematic approach to teaching in tutor periods. Interesting and relevant activities in these and other lessons engage the students' attention and create an effective working atmosphere. However, in a very small number of lessons, the students make insufficient progress because of inadequate teaching. The headteacher and senior leaders are working with heads of department and individuals to develop greater consistency in teaching and in the monitoring of learning. Past observations of lessons have not focussed sufficiently on this latter aspect. Department heads appreciate the range of support provided for them by the senior managers as they develop or extend their management skills. The school is working hard to achieve greater consistency in the application of agreed policies. A couple of administrative monitoring systems were not robust enough resulting, for example, in gaps where data had not been returned from the local authority (LA). Governors provide a high level of support and show a thorough knowledge of changes to the curriculum. They are excellent advocates for the school.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the sixth form is good. Standards are above national figures. Students achieve well in their chosen courses, given the school's open access policy. Progress in the sixth form is good because of good teaching and learning in many lessons and because academic guidance is sharply focussed on students' learning.

More than 65% of students regularly join the sixth form from Year 11, a high proportion, and most remain to complete their courses. Students have access to an outstanding curriculum with options covering an extensive range of academic and vocational courses. Their personal development is outstanding. They communicate confidently with adults, feel well supported by them and enjoy excellent working relationships. 'Teachers are always available and willing to help', commented students. Teaching and learning are good overall, although the school recognises that there is still some inconsistency. When teaching and learning are good, students appreciate teachers' enthusiasm for and knowledge of their subject areas. They also appreciate the opportunities and encouragement to work independently. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form has a clear understanding of what has to be done to improve standards further. The capacity to improve is strong.

What the school should do to improve further

- Focus on the students' learning outcomes when monitoring the quality of lessons.
- Ensure that whole school initiatives continue to reduce boys' underachievement.
- Support the development of middle managers' skills and ensure that all policies and procedures are adhered to consistently.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In 2006 the national test results were considerably above average in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of students attaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was well above average as was the proportion who gained five or more A*-G grades. Very few students finished Year 11 without any GCSE passes.

The school monitors students' progress well and takes effective action where necessary. Progress is particularly good in Years 7 to 9; up to GCSE it has been satisfactory over time, but it has accelerated recently and current data supports the school's judgement that progress is now good. An example of this is the substantial improvement in mathematics.

Although many of the samples of students' work seen during the inspection were above average, there is variation in standards between subjects. Girls reach higher standards than boys, and the gap is wider than it is nationally. Whole school initiatives, such as the provision of a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in football and the Champions' League programme of support are focused on reducing boys' underachievement.

Middle-attaining students have made less progress than others over time but recent interventions have been effective in improving their results, particularly in mathematics and science. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress, because they are well supported in lessons. Students on the youth award programmes achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' good personal development and well-being contribute greatly to their good achievement. Relationships are good. As a result, students co-operate well with each other and with adults and acquire mature attitudes to work. They are confident and responsible. Students'

enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance, the high take-up rates in the sixth form, and their enthusiastic participation in the many interesting activities in school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The vast majority of students behave well and follow the school's behaviour guidelines. Some students say that sanctions are not as effective as they might be because they are applied inconsistently by some staff. Nonetheless, behaviour is good and students feel safe. Any bullying is dealt with promptly and effectively when it is brought to the attention of the school. The mentoring of younger students by Year 12 and Year 9 students increases their sense of security and helps them to settle quickly into school routines.

The school councils represent their fellow students effectively. They are proud of the contribution they make to the school and feel that their views are valued. One member said, 'We help to make the school a better place'. Recently, they have been influential in providing new drinking fountains and have been consulted on the revised behaviour guidelines and the appointment of senior staff. Students contribute to the wider community by raising money for charity as part of the 'Active8' challenges. There is eager participation in the excellent physical and sporting opportunities provided by the school by virtue of its Sports College Status. Good personal development and good levels of basic skills prepares students well for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. There is some outstanding teaching, especially in the sixth form, where students approach their studies with great maturity. In nearly all lessons there is a positive climate for learning, relationships are good, lessons are well managed and students are motivated to learn. Teachers use their specialist skills and knowledge well, and students learn to make good use of a subject's technical language. There are examples of ambitious and challenging work, in GCSE Spanish for example. Students are encouraged to become independent learners and to make choices about the ways in which they learn best. The support for students with learning difficulties is well matched to their individual learning needs. However, marking is of inconsistent quality and specific guidance on how to reach the next level is provided infrequently. A very small amount of teaching is inadequate and students' interest, behaviour and progress deteriorate as a result.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of the curriculum is good. It is outstanding in the sixth form. The programme of extra-curricular activities, built on a tradition of strong provision, is outstanding for all years. Levels of participation by boys and girls are high making an excellent contribution to their personal development. The physical education curriculum has an emphasis on developing ever more appropriate ways of delivering the National Curriculum at both key stages. An increase in award bearing courses at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form has helped to raise standards across all groups. Increased flexibility and imaginative planning of the 14–19 curriculum enable

students to select combinations of traditional GCSE and vocational courses that best meet their individual needs. These developments have encouraged many students to continue their studies into the sixth form. There are many effective links with colleges and employers to support work-related learning. There is a good enrichment programme for gifted and talented students. The curriculum for autistic students, and the youth award programmes for a small group of lower achievers, are very well tailored to meet learning needs. The school is aware that the time allocation for personal, social, health and citizenship education across the school is inadequate. Staff have begun to improve provision in this area, but more work remains to be done.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good overall. Students' academic progress is very well monitored. The role of the tutors in providing academic as well as pastoral support has improved significantly. Students, and many parents who replied to the questionnaire, say that the support the students receive on joining the school is very good. They are well informed about their subject choices and future opportunities. Strong links with many external agencies support vulnerable students well. Support for those with learning and behavioural difficulties, in lessons, in the learning support faculty, and through a range of intervention programmes, is well led, planned and managed. Well-targeted support for the very small number of students whose first language is not English enables them to make good progress. There is very good provision for autistic students from a team of highly trained and flexible staff. However, the school is aware that accommodation for these students, especially in the lower school, is inadequate to meet their personal and social needs. There were some gaps in the recording of responses to external audits.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good overall. The senior leadership team (SLT), which includes the director of the sports college, works most effectively with the headteacher to help staff develop an accurate, shared and agreed understanding of the school's strengths and the areas in need of improvement. This has led to a collective sense of responsibility towards whole school improvement and has increased expectations of what staff and students can achieve. The impact of the school's specialist status on standards has been most positive. The quality of the leadership and management of this area is outstanding. Exceptionally well focused support for students at both ends of the ability range has resulted in high standards in physical education at GCSE. This support has also had a discernible impact on improving students' motivation and grades in other subjects, particularly lower achieving boys. Extensive links with other schools, higher education partners and outside agencies support the school's work admirably.

Self-evaluation has developed well and takes into account the views of staff and governors. The views of parents and students are canvassed and the school takes their feedback seriously. The SLT has correctly identified behaviour as an area that has improved significantly but that could be even stronger. Appropriate systems are in place to monitor the work of departments.

The management of departments is variable and there are minor inconsistencies in the application of agreed policies. For example, parents mentioned differences in the amount of homework set and in the marking of class work. The cohesive approach of the headteacher and SLT supports the development of middle managers' skills well. Some middle managers show a particularly good understanding of their subject's strengths and weaknesses and have developed a range of effective strategies to sustain improvement. These strategies and the departments' self evaluations provide a good model for all departments.

The school works receptively with the local authority and other advisers to ensure consistency in the judgements being made about teaching. Observation schedules do not place enough focus on the learning of students, focussing rather on the strategies employed by the teachers. The development of the form tutor's role has increased the support that students receive. Tutors and students speak highly of the more systematic approach to teaching in tutor periods.

Governance is good. Governors have a thorough knowledge of changes to the curriculum and assessment and are excellent advocates for the school. They provide the school with an effective balance of challenge and support. Vetting procedures for adults who work with learners meet the LA guidelines. However the school does not always check that information is returned from the LA within suitable timescales. The improvements made in standards indicate that the school's capacity to make further improvements is good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
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?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

The quality of provision

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

I am writing to thank you for the warm welcome which you gave to me and my colleagues during our recent visit to Lord Williams's School. We very much enjoyed meeting you and were impressed by the mature and confident way in which you spoke to us. We hope that you and your parents will read the full report which you can find on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

We judge that Lord Williams's School is a good school and deserves its good reputation. You all make an important contribution to the success of the school. Very many of you take part in the large number of sporting and other activities which the school offers. Specialist sports status has enabled the school to provide you with extremely good sports facilities. The vast majority of you are highly motivated learners who behave well and get on very well with adults and each other. Those of you who find learning difficult or less interesting get very good support from the staff. You have told us that you have been helped to settle into school well, feel safe and know who to ask for guidance or support. The governors and staff have worked hard to get the new science block in order to improve the accommodation for that subject. The accommodation for the students in the Chinnor Resource Unit at lower school unit is cramped and also requires improving. You are taught well and enjoy the majority of your lessons. The sixth form offers you a great many opportunities to continue your education and training and is a popular choice for many of you. Your school provides a good standard of education and the headteacher and SLT are working with heads of department to ensure that standards and the quality of teaching continue to rise.

To make your school even better we have recommended that staff focus on what you are learning when they monitor the quality of lessons. We believe that they should continue the things that they have been doing to reduce boys' underachievement and to ensure that all policies and procedures are adhered to consistently. You can play your part here by behaving well and following the rules. We have also asked the school to ensure that all administrative information is up to date to meet government regulations.

I wish you well in your studies in the future.

Catherine Munt HMI