

Warden Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126086
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	293463
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Stephen Long 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	10–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1441
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clare Collins
Headteacher	Stephen Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	21 May 2002
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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

Warden Park is a large school with specialist status for mathematics, computing and modern foreign languages and an international schools award. Students choose to come to the school from a wide geographical area. They are mainly White British. Most are from advantaged social circumstances with fewer than average being entitled to free school meals. A relatively high proportion of students, some 55%, are boys, although there are variations between year groups. There are slightly more students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, than average. The school has a special unit for up to 15 students with specific learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Warden Park is a good school; it has improved well overall since its last inspection and has the capacity to be outstanding. It is a popular choice for parents and carers, the majority of whom testify to its effectiveness. One parent's comment provides a flavour of the largely positive responses received via parents' questionnaires: '...the school motto "getting the best from all" stands the school in very good stead and I believe they strive to deliver this very well.'

Students join the school with above average academic standards. By the end of Years 9 and 11, standards as measured respectively in national assessment tests and GCSE examinations have risen steadily since 2004. They are now well above average and the students make good progress, including those in the special unit. The improvements result from good and improving leadership and management, leading to a better curriculum alongside strengthened teaching and assessment. The headteacher is committed to the school. He has successfully remodelled leadership to better focus staff on improving all students' achievement. The monitoring of the impact of this work is productive and the school knows what to do next. The governors play a good role in holding the school to account. Unfortunately, relationships between the governors and the senior leadership team are strained at times, hindering the development of this essential relationship.

Students are well known by school staff and are well cared for. Guidance and support are effective in promoting good personal development and well-being. Each student is monitored well and the school undertakes a rich range of work to support students in leading healthy, safe and enjoyable lives. However, it does not systematically analyse the impact of all that it does in order to assess the difference made and define where the emphasis of its work might need to be placed next.

Teaching and learning are good because teachers are well qualified and the school takes their professional development seriously. The majority of lessons build effectively on students' prior learning. They offer a positive learning experience, engaging students' interest and sustaining a good pace for learning. Students know their long-term academic targets and often receive good guidance for improvement, for example through marking. Nevertheless, their involvement in assessing their own work and deciding what to do next varies widely. There is some excellent practice, alongside some which does not sufficiently involve the students as participants in their own learning. A small number of parents also noted the need for better communication with the school, for example wanting more opportunities to discuss their children's progress with subject teachers in Years 7 and 8.

The school provides a good curriculum within which specialist status for modern foreign languages has made a strong impact. A wide range of students study languages and the school is engaged in a great deal of partnership work both locally and internationally. The impact and influence of specialist status in mathematics and computing is less clear although this is changing and standards are rising rapidly in information and communication technology (ICT) and steadily in mathematics. The school's provision for sport-related activities is a strength. It is highly valued by students and contributes significantly to their health and, for many, to their commitment to the school as a community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Share the best practice evident in involving students in assessing their own progress and defining ways forward so that it becomes standard practice.
- Ensure the monitoring and evaluation of students' personal development is used to check the impact of the school's work and refine it further.
- Improve relationships between the governing body and the senior leadership team.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' good progress in Years 7 to 9 is reflected in the 2006 Year 9 national tests, where they achieved well above average standards in English, mathematics and science. Boys made better overall progress than girls, although the girls reached higher standards in English. In spite of this, overall results in English fell compared to the previous year. The attainment of current students in Year 9 is well above average and their achievement is good because of better teaching and progress tracking.

The students do well in Years 10 and 11. Results in the 2006 GCSE examinations were well above average. Although the percentage of students achieving five or more grades at A* to C fell slightly and was below the school's ambitious target, the students did better than the previous year across the broad spread of subjects. They also did well on vocational courses and those for which able students were entered early such as English language. The students currently in Year 11 are continuing this picture by making good progress towards challenging targets.

The school has met or exceeded many of the targets associated with its specialist status. However in 2006, targets for ICT were missed at Key Stages 3 and 4. A better curriculum and improved teaching mean that the students are now making good progress in ICT. The school is close to, but has not met, demanding targets in mathematics and modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4.

Vulnerable students make good progress, as do students with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The students are confident and most demonstrate mature attitudes to their work. They form positive relationships with each other and with teachers. The vast majority behave well, reflecting good social and moral development. They adopt safe practices and know when to talk to adults, for example about the rare incidences of bullying. Their understanding of the importance of leading healthy lives is outstanding, as demonstrated by good eating habits and enthusiastic participation in sport. Although attendance is average, the students say they enjoy school. Their cultural development is good because of the breadth of curriculum provision and their contribution to the community both within and outside the school. Students are keen to support a variety of worthy causes, including a local hospital and the children in a neighbouring special school. They participate with enthusiasm in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, drama productions and links with other countries. They celebrate success in school assemblies, for example performing dance routines, but do not always take the opportunity to reflect on their

lives spiritually. The students acquire a good range of workplace skills, such as in literacy and ICT, alongside the personal qualities essential for their economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has good procedures to improve consistency in teaching so that the majority of lessons are good with some examples of outstanding practice. The teaching of students with learning difficulties in the school as a whole and in the "Special Support" and "Learning Support" centres is good, enabling them to do well. Additional adults are well deployed and enhance learning in most teaching situations. The strong features in lessons are progression in planning so that learning builds in logical steps, teachers' good subject knowledge, the positive relationships with students which often facilitate good management of their behaviour, and effective questioning to check and extend students' understanding. Less consistent features of lessons are that most, but not all, teachers set regular and useful homework and while some teachers make good use of ICT to aid learning, for example using interactive whiteboards, this is not commonplace. There is also some variability in tracking the progress of groups of students within subjects, so that in a minority of lessons, learning is less well matched to the full range of students' needs and some are not fully stretched.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including trips and clubs with local and international dimensions. Sporting activities are broad and outstandingly successful. Links with partner primary schools, including those supporting transition, are excellent. Connections with local secondary schools and colleges offer good extension of curriculum provision, such as in vocational courses.

Specialist status for languages has fostered extensive links with schools and colleges internationally. It has enriched local partnerships, for example through a Eurozone, introducing primary children to French, German and Spanish. Language provision within the school is being broadened to include Mandarin, Italian and Latin. The impact of the school's specialist status for mathematics and computing is gaining momentum, for example through an improved ICT curriculum at Key Stage 3 and better computer facilities.

There is a good range of vocational options in Key Stage 4, some taught off site. Students are well supported on these and their progress is closely monitored. The attention given to covering any gaps if they miss lessons when off site is exceptional.

The school recognizes that it does not meet requirements for religious education at Key Stage 4, contributing to the students' relative weakness in spiritual development. Appropriate course arrangements are being implemented from September.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Form tutors, house leaders and learning mentors know their students well. They monitor and support their academic and personal development effectively. The school works well with external agencies and has considerable success in supporting vulnerable or disaffected students

and children in care. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are robust and reviewed regularly. Careful attention is given to risk assessments and the school provides a safe and supportive learning environment. Most students appreciate the balance struck between being made responsible for their own behaviour whilst being expected to adhere to basic rules. Students are given an active voice in the school through the school council. They are informed well about future study options and advice on careers is exemplary. The school provides good opportunities for students to understand the world of work, including well planned work experience in Year 10.

Most students are aware of their academic targets, such as for the end of a key stage, and of their progress towards them. However, they do not always know how to improve in the shorter term, especially in Years 7 to 9. There are examples of very detailed guidance for improvement, for example in marking and classroom discussion. However, students are not consistently involved in using the assessment process to define, and take ownership, of what they need to do to move on.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The senior team is a cohesive group, sharing the aims for the school effectively with the staff as a whole. A good programme of monitoring and evaluation gives them a clear grasp of the areas of the school's work that require improvement. As a result the overall development plan contains well focused targets for students' academic progress. However, enhancing the students' personal development is less coherent because although a wide range of effective work takes place, its impact is not systematically evaluated. As a consequence, targets for students' personal development are not sharply focused and progressively refined at all levels of school improvement planning and review.

Those in middle leadership positions, such as house and subject leaders, make a good contribution to leadership with examples of very good practice. The school has identified and is addressing some variations in their understanding of how to monitor the students' progress in order to target improvements. Senior leaders provide good support where required and middle leaders' capacity to provide independent strategic direction is becoming more uniform. Support for staff development overall is good. The outcomes of the monitoring of teaching, alongside imperatives in development planning, are used well to identify training needs and exploit internal and external resources. Consequently there is a good culture for staff development.

The governors monitor the school well and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through analysing performance data and through visits to the school. However, tensions have emerged in their relationship with the headteacher and senior leaders because, although a good range of data is available to them, the governors do not universally feel that it presents a succinct picture of the school's work.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the school'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	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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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	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?	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
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
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

8 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Warden Park School, Cuckfield, West Sussex RH17 5DP

This letter is to confirm the outcome of the school's inspection and to thank the many of you who took the time to talk to us and answer questions.

Warden Park is a good school which is well led and improving. It provides you with a good standard of education, both academically and in developing you as young adults. You behave well and most of you said you enjoy school, feel safe and well cared for and have opportunities to get involved in a wide range of activities in and out of school. This reflects the view of your parents and carers. The results of examinations and tests tell us that you make good academic progress and this was borne out by what we saw in lessons, where teaching was often good and sometimes outstanding. You get good guidance from teachers about how to improve and some involve you well in deciding how to make your work better. However, this could be more commonly the case. A small number of parents and carers also felt they would like better communication with subject teachers over their children's progress. The curriculum is good with especially wide opportunities to study languages and to get involved in sport; the latter appeared to be very popular and helps you keep healthy. The headteacher and the staff have a good understanding of which areas of the school's work to improve, especially in boosting academic achievement further. The school does a lot to support your wider personal and social development, for example helping everyone to behave well and contribute to the school as a community. However it does not always check where it is making the most difference and which areas need more work. Similarly the governors check carefully how well the school is doing but could work more closely with the headteacher and his colleagues to make sure they have easy access to all the information they need.

Within the school's improvement planning we have asked the headteacher to include the following issues:

- Involve you more in deciding how to improve your work in each subject.
- Check that the work to support your personal development is having the intended effect and find any weaker areas so that these can be tackled.
- Ensure the governing body and senior leaders work cohesively together.

Good luck for the future and thank you again for your help.

Stephen Long Her Majesty's Inspector