

Wardle High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105852
Local Authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	299761
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Jane Austin HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1145
6th form	131
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs G Mortimer
Headteacher	Mr G Wright
Date of previous school inspection	19 October 1998
School address	Birch Road Wardle Rochdale Lancashire OL12 9RD
Telephone number	01706 373911
Fax number	01706 377980

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

When Wardle High School was inspected in March 2005 it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to provide an acceptable standard of education for its students.

Subsequently, Her Majesty's Inspectors have made four visits to monitor the school's progress. This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wardle High School is larger than average overall, with a sixth form of average size. It holds specialist status for the performing arts. Students come from the local area where socio-economic circumstances are broadly average. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is average. Almost all students are White British, with only a small number from other backgrounds: all are fluent in English. The school has a resourced unit for physically impaired students. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, while the percentage with statements of special educational needs is broadly average. The school has the Artsmark and Healthy Schools Awards as well as Investors in People status. It is a member of Rochdale's Excellence in Cities partnership. The headteacher took up post in January 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. The school now provides a satisfactory education for its students.

The headteacher's strong, clear-sighted leadership has been pivotal in its improvement. His vision for the school's development is supported by good strategic planning, founded on accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. He has drawn together an able, committed senior team and together they have established the key systems required to move the school forward. As a result of good quality training and support from the local authority, middle leaders are able to take appropriate responsibility for their part in implementing these whole-school procedures. Thorough monitoring of lessons has led to improvements so that the quality of teaching and learning is now satisfactory. As a consequence, students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are making satisfactory progress to reach broadly average standards. However, some variation across subjects remains due to previous deficits in learning. In particular, the school recognises that performance in science is not good enough and is taking suitable steps to remedy this. Well-founded targets in all subjects are set for every student and their progress towards these checked through regular assessments. Those falling behind are helped to get back on track in a range of effective ways, such as mentoring. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive well-tailored support because arrangements for identifying their needs and evaluating their progress are good. The care, guidance and support provided for students are good. The school goes to great lengths to ensure no student is left to struggle alone with their problems.

Students are responding well to the improvements in school life. They say they feel safe in school and that any incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Increased enjoyment of lessons has resulted in positive attitudes to learning. As a consequence of this, and good monitoring procedures, attendance has risen and is now in line with the national average. Behaviour is generally good, although some students become restless when learning is too heavily directed by the teacher. A clear system of rewards and sanctions is effective in underpinning the school's high expectations of students' conduct. Students appreciate the opportunities they have to express their views through student councils and feel that their ideas are taken into account when decisions are made.

Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory. It is better at Key Stage 3 than for students in Years 10 and 11, where the choice of vocational courses is restricted. The school's specialism in performing arts is extending the range of learning activities and playing a role in tackling underachievement. For instance, dance is being used to good effect to raise the self-esteem and confidence of some groups of learners. Extra-curricular opportunities linked to dance, drama and, notably, brass band music, enhance students' learning and personal development very well.

In bringing about these significant improvements the headteacher, senior leaders and governors have demonstrated that the school has good capacity to improve. It provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Overall, performance is average: however, standards and students' achievement are rising. This is related, in part, to better guidance for students in selecting appropriate courses. It is also because the quality of leadership and management is good. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning which, while remaining satisfactory overall, is becoming more interactive and engaging. Examples of good and outstanding teaching and learning challenged the students to develop their thinking and to adopt an intellectual rigour in their work. In lessons where students are less involved, they make steady but comparatively slower progress. Helpfully, particularly good practice in business studies and expressive arts subjects is being shared.

Students take responsibility and are rightly proud of their contribution to the main school. The prefects provide mentoring and academic support in a wide variety of subjects for students in Years 7 to 10. They are good listeners to any problems students might have. This is because they are themselves treated with respect and well prepared for their future. 'You can't get away from help here' according to one student, a view echoed by others. Good provision for students' personal development and well-being results in proud and loyal members of the school and their community. Enrichment is good and includes a wide range of well-attended activities from 'Grub on a grant' to digital photography. A wide variety of sporting and performing arts activities is on offer. Students are safeguarded by effective signing out procedures.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in science.
- Ensure all lessons fully engage students in their learning in order to improve achievement.
- Broaden the curriculum at Key Stage 4 so that it meets the needs of all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. This is a significant improvement, but the school is still working to overcome the legacy of considerable underachievement in previous years. The 2006 national test results for Year 9 showed a marked improvement on those in previous years and matched national averages. Higher attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities made good progress. Targets were met. Students did particularly well in mathematics and English also showed a continuing improving trend. Despite a considerable increase, science results remained below average.

GCSE results in 2006 were also much better than those in the previous years. These students had not done well enough in many subjects in some earlier years but achieved examination results in line with the national average. Good analysis of data by the school enabled teachers to identify where students had underachieved in the past. It also raised expectations and resulted in a determined focus to do better by teachers and students alike. In a marked contrast to previous years, students' progress accelerated in Key Stage 4, pulling back some of the previous underachievement. Boys, apart from lower attainers, did well and results overall in mathematics and English showed students making good progress. Science results were not good enough and lagged considerably behind other subjects. Students did well in the performing

arts specialist areas of music, drama and dance but achievement in most other subjects was mediocre. Results from the AS and A2 examinations were in line with the national average: students made satisfactory progress from their starting points.

All students now have targets and are told clearly how they are doing and where improvement can be made. Tracking systems are good, so that teachers are well aware of students' progress. Underachievement is spotted quickly: strategies for tackling it by different provision or additional support are proving successful. Students appreciate what is being done for them and are responding sensibly and well. Lesson observations show that standards are continuing to rise and that students are making consistently satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students appreciate the commitment of staff in getting the school back on the right course. They cite many examples of how things have improved including better lessons, behaviour and a friendlier learning environment. Overall, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The many opportunities for participation in performing arts activities contribute well to students' personal development, particularly in its social, cultural and physical aspects. Improving behaviour has been a priority. The school has introduced rigorous systems for monitoring and dealing with incidents and through consistently high expectations of work and behaviour. Although staff and some students comment that it is still not perfect, unacceptable behaviour and exclusions have fallen sharply over the last two years. Students generally behave well and form good relationships with their teachers and each other. This contributes much to the purposeful atmosphere that is evident during lessons and around school. Attitudes and enthusiasm for learning are good, particularly where the range of activities is varied and engaging. Most students apply themselves well and this is helping raise their levels of achievement. However, where lessons fail to capture students' interest fully there can be some inattentiveness and low level disruption which slows their learning and that of others in the class. Retention on sixth form courses or in full-time education elsewhere is good and indicates students' positive attitudes to learning. The development of basic skills and arrangements for work experience prepare students satisfactorily for the next stage of learning.

Students, too, play their part in improving the school. Taking an active part in school life as council members, prefects and buddies develops students' sense of social responsibility and initiative in helping others. Students are involved in a range of activities to help those less fortunate than themselves. The efforts of the school council have contributed to improvements such as the changes in uniform and school meals. Students now have a wider choice of nutritious food and many select the healthy options. Attendance is improving due to the school's concerted efforts and students' increased enthusiasm for learning. However, not all students are punctual enough to lessons and therefore some valuable learning time is lost.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and improving. This is because clear systems that target students' progress are understood and followed by staff and students. Good practice in the school's specialist areas is being shared so that effective use of active methods such as role play is increasing. Mathematics teachers value the work done with dance staff to stimulate the teaching of probability and science staff value the work done with drama and music staff to enliven the study of electric current and sound. Good lessons fully engage students and promote enquiring minds: a brisk pace encourages them to work diligently. Particularly good use of the interactive whiteboards expands access to interesting resources and promotes students' enjoyment. Lessons are planned according to the needs of the students including clear individual education planning for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Where lessons are not as productive, students are passive recipients of teaching, instructions are not clear enough and students do not quite understand what to do. Consequently, their interest decreases and some low level chatter distracts a small number from the task in hand. Activities are rushed so do not provide the depth required to extend learning. Effective procedures for assessment and marking mean that students have a clear idea about how they are getting on and what to do to make improvements to their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's curriculum meets students' needs and enables them to achieve satisfactorily. The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9. Students in Year 7 who found it difficult to adjust when moving from primary school, have been helped in a special 'progress group' and have now moved into ordinary classes. All Year 7 students have the opportunity to study dance and those in Years 8 and 9 receive the recommended two hours of physical education, helping to encourage regular exercise and a healthy lifestyle. Students speak appreciatively of beginning a GCSE music course in Year 9, providing extra challenge and enabling them to move on to a more advanced course or a different subject in Year 11. The initiatives in dance and music illustrate the positive influence on the curriculum of the school's specialist status in performing arts.

In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum contains all the required subjects. The range of optional subjects is satisfactory but there are only a few vocational courses and the school acknowledges the need for more such courses to give students further choices and better opportunities to succeed. The school provides an 'alternative curriculum' for students who are likely to become disaffected. These arrangements are carefully planned to ensure that students get appropriate qualifications and gain experience that will help them with future employment.

The sixth form curriculum is also satisfactory. Students choose from a good range of academic A-level subjects but the choice of vocational courses is limited. Students also follow a course in personal, social and health education and have opportunities for physical education. Hence enrichment is now good, indicating an improvement since the previous inspection.

The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities including visits, exchanges, revision clubs and sport. Linked to the school's specialism, there are particular strengths in the performing arts where many students are given high quality opportunities both for competition and public performance, including opportunities to appear in television productions.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Changes to staffing structure, with clearer definition of roles and responsibilities, are leading to good quality, well coordinated pastoral care and support. There are effective channels of communication at all levels and, as a consequence, staff have a much clearer picture of students' individual needs. A high level of support is provided for individuals or groups of students who are vulnerable or experiencing problems of any kind. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are provided with good support so they achieve as well as others. Academic progress is tracked effectively: students know how well they are doing and how to improve their work. At each point of transition in their school life students receive good support and advice about the choices they have to make. Arrangements for child protection, safe recruitment of staff and health and safety are fully in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, leadership and management are good. The resolute and sharply focused leadership of the headteacher has resulted in thoroughgoing improvement. He has gained the commitment of staff at all levels to his aspirational vision for the school's future. In working towards this goal, he is ably supported by the deputy headteacher and senior team who have stepped up to the challenge of rapidly securing the necessary improvements. A range of well-considered systems has been established to achieve this, the effects of which are becoming increasingly evident. Improved assessment and tracking of students' progress are having a positive impact so that standards are rising. Systems for supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are comprehensive, well matched to their needs and efficiently managed. The school has been well supported by the local authority in developing robust procedures for assuring the quality of lessons: these have resulted in substantial improvements to teaching and students' learning. Improved procedures and capacity mean that the school can evaluate its provision accurately, identify suitable priorities for the future and plan effectively to achieve these. Planning now takes good account of the contribution of the school's specialism to all aspects of its work.

The headteacher has made the development of leadership skills a high priority and this is bearing fruit. The roles of middle leaders have been articulated clearly and regular, well focused training has been provided to support them in discharging their roles. As a consequence, there is a shared understanding of responsibilities and a growing consistency in meeting these. This increase in the skills of middle leaders is having a positive impact on the school's drive to raise standards through improved provision.

The school has developed a number of effective methods for communicating regularly with and seeking the views of both parents and the wider community. A range of performing arts activities helps sustain links with the community and partner primary schools. These are further enhanced by a variety of curriculum, sports and leisure courses and events.

Since the last inspection there has been a significant improvement in the quality of governance which is now good. Governors, under the strong leadership of the chair of governors, maintain a keen focus on all aspects of the school's performance and make effective use of their expertise in providing both support and challenge to the leadership team.

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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	3
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	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
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	3	
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	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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
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	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Wardle High School, Rochdale, OL12 9RD

No doubt you have heard the good news by now! When we visited your school recently we judged that it is providing you with a satisfactory education so special measures are no longer required. Our thanks to all of you who shared your views about the school with us. We were impressed by your pride in the school and loyalty to it.

Your headteacher and all the staff have worked very hard to make the changes that were needed and you told us how much you appreciated this. The main points we want to report about your school are as follows.

- You are enjoying lessons more because they are interesting and as a result you are making more progress. You have positive attitudes to learning, although some of you get distracted when you're not directly involved in the lesson. We have asked the school to ensure that lessons always engage you fully.
- Results in the Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations have improved, particularly in English and mathematics. However, there is still room for improvement, especially in science. You need to work hard to meet your targets.
- The staff make every effort to provide you with all the support you need to do well. They set you targets and help those of you who are struggling to meet these. Those of you who find learning difficult or have disabilities are provided with support that matches your needs well and helps you make satisfactory progress.
- You told us that you feel safe in school and that any bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively. Behaviour has improved and so has your attendance. Please keep this up.
- You study a suitable range of subjects but we have asked the school to extend the options you have in Years 10 and 11 to include more vocational courses.
- You are privileged to be able to participate in such a wide range of music, dance and drama activities, events, productions and competitions. Your school's brass bands are unusually good.
- Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Sixth form students make a good contribution to school life.

We think Wardle High School will continue to improve, you can play an important part in making that happen. We wish you every success in the future.