

Wishmore Cross School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125462
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	301985
Inspection date	26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Linda McGill HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	44
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bernard Bartlett
Headteacher	Ms Derry Close
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2003
School address	Alpha Road Chobham Woking GU24 8NE
Telephone number	01276 857555
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Wishmore Cross is a special school which caters for boys aged 11 - 16 who have a statement of special educational need for emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are 45 boys on roll, all but one are of White British heritage. The school offers boarding provision for 24 boys for up to four nights per week. Many of the boys have experienced periods of disruption in their educational careers and this means that most are underachieving when they join the school. The school has experienced difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff in recent years, although the position is now more stable.

This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the boarding provision.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

Wishmore Cross School has successfully overcome many of the difficulties that it has faced since its last inspection. It offers its pupils an acceptable standard of education. However, some aspects of its work have proved harder to shift and the school rightly recognises that despite recent improvements aspects of the pupils' personal development; in particular their behaviour and attendance, are not yet good enough. In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005 HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the pupils' personal development, especially their behaviour and attendance.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and the proportion of good teaching is increasing. However, not all staff are equally skilled in using and applying the school's policies and procedures and in managing the pupils' behaviour. This, together with low attendance rates for many pupils and their unsatisfactory attitudes to learning, means that pupils usually make satisfactory, rather than good, progress in their learning over their time at the school. The results of national tests and GCSE examinations fall short of what is expected for pupils' ages, but achievement is satisfactory when their low starting points are taken into account. There is no doubting the commitment of the teaching and support staff to providing the best for the pupils, but recent changes are not yet consistently implemented which means that not all pupils are learning as well as they could.

The pupils get mixed messages about their behaviour, because some staff are more tolerant of poor behaviour and swearing than others. This, together with a curriculum which until recently gave insufficient emphasis to personal development and the fact that some lessons fail to fully engage the pupils, has led to too much unacceptable behaviour. Parents and pupils have been concerned about high levels of bullying, in particular. Recent steps taken by the school are showing some success and there has been a reduction in bullying, but records show that incidents of physical assault and verbal abuse still occur too often. Pupils swear frequently and are disrespectful of their teachers, support staff and each other. Pupils still do not always feel safe in school, nor do they behave in a way which keeps themselves and others safe. Overall, behaviour is better in the evenings in the boarding accommodation, where the atmosphere is one of relative calm.

That notwithstanding, for some of the time the pupils behave well. When working one-to-one with an adult they are cooperative and willing to learn. In some lessons, pupils show interest and enthusiasm. Despite the efforts the school has made there is a high degree of unauthorised absence. Internal truancy has decreased, but too many pupils are late for their lessons. There are relative strengths in some aspects of the pupils' personal development, for example, their contribution to the school and local community, but overall it is inadequate.

The quality of care and guidance provided for the pupils is satisfactory. The school cares well for the pupils and works productively with a number of other agencies to promote their welfare. Staff keep detailed records of boys' progress toward the targets in their individual plans and track academic progress, although this aspect is not so well developed. Staff are calm and warm in their relationships with the boys.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Senior staff and governors have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are working hard to bring about

improvement. There is a clear sense of direction and purpose. However, the pace of change has been affected by difficulties in the past which means that overall improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The school's priorities are the right ones and the draft development plan contains challenging targets. Recent improvements to the curriculum and the impact of the anti-bullying initiative show that the school has a satisfactory capacity to continue to improve. Because its overall effectiveness is inadequate, the school does not give satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 3

Since it was last inspected almost a year ago, the quality of the boarding provision has improved and now meets national minimum standards. Boys reported that they feel safer in the boarding accommodation than they do in the main school and that bullying is not so prevalent there. Care staff make an effective contribution to the pupils' education, for example, by encouraging and helping them complete their homework.

What the school should do to improve further

- Take steps to improve pupils' personal development by reducing unacceptable behaviour and bullying and raising attendance levels.
- Iron out inconsistencies in teaching and raise its quality to the level of the best.
- Make sure that all staff deal with unacceptable behaviour in the same way.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The results of national tests for fourteen-year-olds fall far short of the national average, and by the time they leave school, not many of the pupils reach the standard expected for their age. However, their achievement is generally satisfactory given their low starting points on entry. Almost all pupils who attend regularly leave with some qualification and most obtain one or more passes at GCSE. The small numbers of pupils in each year group mean that year-on-year comparisons are unreliable, but the most recent set of published figures (for pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2005) shows that these pupils made better progress than would have been expected across Key Stage 3.

In lessons where behaviour does not interrupt learning and where they are interested in the content, pupils make steady progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

Overall, the pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are inadequate. This is because there are too many occasions when pupils' behaviour is unacceptable, and because attendance is too low. Initiatives to reduce bullying are having a positive impact but there is still some way to go before all pupils feel safe in school. The pupils report that bullying has reduced in the evenings but that it is still prevalent during the school day. The school's records of incidents of verbal and physical abuse show that they take place too often. Pupils frequently use foul and abusive language. The rate of exclusions is reducing but still high, as is the level of detentions for minor misdemeanours. In some lessons, the pupils clearly enjoy what they are doing but in others they quickly vote with their feet.

Nevertheless, staff are patient and persevere with pupils, with some success. For example, Year 9 pupils once refused to attend English lessons but now take part; two boys were interested when reading from 'The Tempest' and showed some insight and understanding of the motivations of Shakespeare's characters. The pupils' views are sought and listened to and they take responsibility in school, partly through the school council but also when included in evaluations of initiatives and on selection panels for new staff. There is no doubting the pupils' enthusiasm for physical activity and they enjoy lessons in food technology; however, their commitment to healthy lifestyles is not yet wholehearted. Boys who attend regularly usually leave the school suitably prepared for the next step in their lives, either to go to work or attend college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, but there is a growing number of good features and the school is well placed to spread good practice from within. Teachers take care to plan their lessons so that they take account of individual needs and styles of learning. They also make sure that support staff know exactly what part they will play in the lesson. Lesson content, however, does not always engage the pupils and staff are not equally skilled at making it clear to the pupils the reasons why they are being asked to do particular pieces of work or what is expected of them by the end of the lesson. Learning support assistants work well alongside teachers and play an active role in lessons. Care assistants, too, help to ensure that boarders complete their homework.

Learning does not always match the teaching and some lessons fall apart despite satisfactory or good teaching. This is because some of the pupils are on very short fuses and behaviour can deteriorate rapidly affecting their own and others' learning. In addition, pupils who arrive late for lessons sometimes deliberately disrupt others' concentration. On other occasions, pupils apply themselves well and take pride in what they are doing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's curriculum is firmly rooted in the national curriculum and gives due emphasis to basic skills. It has been broadened recently and now better meets the needs and aspirations of the pupils, particularly at Key Stage 4. Here, the school is striving to offer a more personalised approach but at the same time makes sure that there are sufficient opportunities for pupils to work together. Links with local schools have the potential to further broaden the range of options available for the pupils. It has been recognised that personal development needs a much stronger profile, and lessons are now timetabled weekly, alongside the regular 'personal growth and development' days. Cross-curricular links are growing well. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities and the school makes sure that day-pupils as well as boarders have the chance to participate in them.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school supports its pupils well and promotes their welfare. Procedures for safeguarding the pupils are robust and well known. The school works well with a wide number of outside

agencies and with parents to try to find ways forward for the pupils at this critical point in their lives. Progress towards the targets in pupils' individual plans is tracked carefully and reviewed regularly at 'focus group' meetings which involve teachers, care and support staff. Procedures for monitoring and tracking academic progress are developing well. These are all good features. However, care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall because the continuing difficulties with the pupils' behaviour mean that the learning environment is not always safe.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher and senior staff provide clear direction for the school's work. Enthusiastic and committed staff give good leadership in their areas of responsibility and there is an evident commitment to improvement. Setbacks in recent years caused the rate of improvement to falter, but the school is now back on track and there is an evident forward trend. The school's procedures for reviewing and evaluating the impact of its work include pupils, parents and governors. This means that strengths and weaknesses are well known. The draft plan for improvement reflects key weaknesses and contains challenging targets. It is appropriately focused on both raising standards and improving the pupils' personal development.

Governors support the school well, and fulfil their statutory obligations. They are involved in shaping the school's direction by working alongside senior staff at annual improvement planning days. There is scope to strengthen the part they play in holding the school to account.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4
The behaviour of learners	4
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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
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?	3

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
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	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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 school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

22 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Wishmore Cross School, Woking, GU24 8NE

I am writing to let you know the findings of the inspection which I carried out at your school recently. I'd like to thank those of you who spoke to me and my colleagues during the day and those of you whose lessons we attended.

Your school does some things well. The headteacher and staff work closely with your parents and others to try to support you in managing your behaviour and in making progress towards the targets in your individual plans. Your teachers plan lessons carefully to take account of your needs and those of you who attend regularly generally make satisfactory progress. Recent changes to the curriculum have broadened the range of opportunities available to you and made sure that good emphasis is given to meeting your personal development needs.

The school has also worked hard to try to reduce the amount of bullying, poor behaviour and swearing. There has been some success, and you say that you feel safer at school, particularly those of you who are boarders during the week. However, there is still too much bad behaviour and it is affecting your learning. Many of you do not attend regularly enough. Because of this, the school has been given a notice to improve. Over the next twelve months, the school has been asked to:

- improve your personal development by further reducing bullying, swearing, unacceptable behaviour and improving attendance rates
- making sure that all teaching is as good as the best
- making sure that all staff deal with unacceptable behaviour in the same way.

You can help the school in its efforts by attending as much as you can, by showing more respect to the staff who work with you and to each other and by improving your own behaviour.

I wish you every success in your efforts,

Yours sincerely,

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector