

Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100187
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	307324
Inspection dates	1–2 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Michael Lynes 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bob Janes
Headteacher	Mr Byron Parker
Date of previous school inspection	14 March 2005
School address	Hutchins Road London SE28 8AT
Telephone number	020 8310 7000
Fax number	020 8310 6464

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school has a high number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, although about two fifths are of White British origin. A fifth are of Black African heritage and the remainder from a wide range of ethnicities. A relatively high proportion are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language (EAL). A much higher number of students than is typically found nationally have learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). The largest proportion, about a tenth of all students, have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and a significant number are identified as having dyslexia. The school has a specialist dyslexia centre to cater for their needs; the only such provision in the local authority.

The school has been a Technology College since 1997, specialising in mathematics, science, design and technology, and information and communication technology (ICT). It has the Healthy Schools award and was the first school in the country to receive the gold award for work-related learning, in 2007. The school, in partnership with Plumstead Manor School for girls, offers a range of post-16 course for students from both schools, on the Woolwich Polytechnic site. However, this provision did not form part of this inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school. The headteacher's aspiration to achieve excellence infuses all aspects of the 'Poly'. Everyone connected with it should be very proud of its achievements, particularly over the past two years. Parents and carers certainly are, as the large number of overwhelmingly positive responses to the confidential questionnaire strongly demonstrate. One said that, 'All teachers go the extra mile to support the children, not just in academic matters but also in developing confidence'. This is an astute comment, as emotional intelligence is one of the hallmarks of the school. This manifests itself in excellent relationships and attitudes. The 'Poly' is a calm, purposeful learning community, which develops young men who are very well prepared for life in all respects. The school has high expectations of both staff and students and they rise enthusiastically to the challenge.

In addition to outstanding personal development, the curriculum is also excellent. It has been thoughtfully constructed to ensure a wide range of choice. Its good impact on achievement at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is evident. However, the school is not yet outstanding overall as it judges itself to be. This is because the high degree of personalisation evident in both personal development and the curriculum is not consistent in classrooms. This means that whilst academic progress is undoubtedly good, it has been variable since the last inspection. Certain groups of learners, in particular the more able and those at the early stages of learning English, do not make as much progress as other groups. Achievement has been consistently good at Key Stage 3 but has varied at Key Stage 4. Results have fluctuated since the previous inspection but outcomes in the last two years indicate the beginnings of a clear upward trend. Specialist status continues to have a good impact on the work of the school. Provision and examination results in ICT have improved and the development of the Learning Gateway since the last inspection is much appreciated by students. Results in mathematics have demonstrated consistently good achievement at both Key Stage 3 and 4.

The school has developed a very positive ethos that is embodied by the 'Poly' identity. The smart uniform, clear policies on behaviour and homework, and the distinctive system for monitoring academic progress are all clear indicators of this. This ethos permeates the school and underpins the high expectations of success. There is a strong sense of warmth and pride throughout the school. This was apparent during a literacy session, when boys and staff were reading silently across the whole school. This was taken seriously by everyone and there was a real sense of engagement with language that was wonderful to experience.

A culture of openness and trust permeates working relationships among senior and middle leaders. The impact of their leadership is evident in the good progress and exemplary personal development. As noted by a Year 11 student, 'We are like a big family and we have to aspire to be the best we can be'. Governors, senior and middle leaders all share the same high aspirations for students and they approach their work with enthusiasm and determination. The school, therefore, has very good capacity to improve even further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use a greater range of teaching and learning strategies so that students' individual needs are met more effectively, particularly for the more able and those at the early stages of learning English as an additional language.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter Year 7 on average with the skills, knowledge and understanding well below those typically found nationally. Results in national tests at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11 are broadly similar to national figures. This represents good achievement, as was confirmed by the good progress seen in lessons during this inspection. In 2007, those boys who were at the early stages of learning English and those who started at the higher levels made less progress than other students. Their achievement was satisfactory. White British boys, who often had weaker attainment when they started, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, made good progress. The school's own monitoring indicates that the achievement of different groups varies from year to year.

The unvalidated results for 2008 indicate significant improvement, particularly in the Year 9 tests. Results in English, mathematics and science were very similar to those of boys nationally. This indicates that progress at Key Stage 3 was at least good. It has been most consistent in mathematics and most variable in English since the last inspection. GCSE results for 2008 show a significant improvement for the number of 5 A*-Cs without English and mathematics. When these subjects are included, improvement is more modest. This was due to a decline in the English results.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding because of the way students develop into young men that the school and their families can be very proud of. In particular, the contribution that the school makes to developing emotional intelligence and promoting good mental health is excellent. The work of the school's own counselling service is exemplary in this regard. The impact of this work can be seen not only in academic results but also felt in the calm atmosphere in the school. There are very high levels of mutual respect between staff and students. Behaviour is superb and relationships across the school are mature. Students from different ethnic backgrounds work and play together harmoniously. This was evident during an outstanding assembly, which celebrated the end of the fasting month for Muslims and was led by non-Muslim students. The 'Poly' is relaxed but purposeful and this creates an outstanding atmosphere for learning.

Students feel that their views are taken seriously and that they influence some of the school's important decisions e.g. the appointment of senior staff. They say that bullying is rare and, when it does happen, staff deal with it effectively. They therefore feel very secure in school. Students are highly motivated by the range of rewards, opportunities and responsibilities. As noted by a Year 11 student, 'We always celebrate success and this is one of the best things about the school.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students contribute confidently in lessons because of very good relationships with staff. The vast majority concentrate well and really want to succeed. Lessons are often well prepared and time is stipulated for different elements so that learning is pacy and engaging. However, staff

sometimes adopt a whole-class approach too rigidly and, as a result, students' individual needs are not addressed sufficiently well. There is a good emphasis on practical approaches and this helps to engage students' interest. In a Year 9 lesson, boys planned their own drama to act out potential life situations that could have either a positive or a negative ending. Staff ensure a good level of health and safety. In science, for example, students wore goggles and gloves as they worked enthusiastically analysing food samples. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to deal effectively with questions that arise.

Learning intentions are shared well with students, although teachers do not always share the success criteria with students to help them evaluate how well they have done. Individual education plans are well written for students with statements of additional needs, and have clear targets for future learning. Teaching assistants are very skilled in their roles in supporting these students. Those learning English as an additional language are not as well catered for and, as a result, they make only satisfactory progress.

Marking of students' work is good, frequently helpful and supports their future learning. Staff motivate students well by referring them to good exemplars of past students' work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school judges its curriculum to be good but inspectors think that it is now outstanding. This is because of developments since the last inspection. There has been a systematic widening of the curriculum for the older students, following the recommendations of an HMI report on science and design and technology two years ago. Now, a quarter of students in both years 10 and 11 are able to undertake a wide range of courses, following their interests and aptitudes in local colleges and with training providers. This leads to good examination results in these subjects.

In Years 7 to 9 the school has piloted a very effective approach to raising standards in literacy by linking English and humanities together so that fewer teachers teach students longer. The impact of this can be seen in the consistently good Key Stage 3 results. Students use ICT well as a tool for learning, to extend their skills and give them access to the school's Learning Gateway, which they use to improve their work.

A regular Saturday school extends the school week and selected students are invited to attend. Teachers give generously of their time to enable this to take place and the school believes that it was a key factor in the improved 2008 GCSE results. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities and the school is well known for the success of its sports teams.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good care, guidance and support enable students to grow in stature, developing their intellectual and social skills very effectively. The key to this growth is the outstanding relationships between students and staff and between students, that enable them to listen well and to learn very effectively. The school fosters very positive attitudes both to learning and to personal development. It takes very active steps in safeguarding its students' welfare and in giving them a very safe environment to live and work.

Students speak highly of the way in which they are guided and supported. They are given regular targets, which are reviewed regularly, and the necessary support to enable them to

make good progress. However, the assessment of the progress of students learning English as an additional language is inadequate and, as a result, the school cannot be sure how well they are achieving. Exclusions are very low because the school has a very strong ethos of care that is supplemented by a counselling programme that every student can access to help them overcome problems that concern them.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher's leadership is outstanding. He leads with passion, commitment and integrity. He strives to ensure that all new developments have a positive impact on learning. Students speak warmly of his direct day-to-day involvement, and they view him as a powerful motivating force. He is very ably supported by a highly effective senior team. They embody the school motto of 'learning empowers' in all aspects of their work. The school has been extremely innovative in developing staff, so that leadership responsibilities are distributed, and talents and abilities are used to the full.

Academic progress is very carefully monitored, and self-evaluation is now more rigorous and largely accurate. However, the actions that result from this have not yet brought about sustained improvement in students' progress. This is because although senior leaders judge the quality of teaching very accurately they have not improved it sufficiently to cater consistently for the needs of all groups of students. As a result, progress is good rather than outstanding. The senior team works closely with a very good team of middle leaders. Monitoring of the quality of their work and its impact on student achievement is rigorous. However, the leadership of the EAL department is not sufficiently targeted on securing good achievement for students at the early stages of learning English.

The school makes a good contribution to developing a cohesive community within the school. Students recognise and value their culturally diverse environment. Governors understand the need to continue working with parental groups and other community members to ensure maximum participation in education and to recognise and celebrate diversity. The governing body is very effective and plays an active role in the life of the school. They know the school well and provide challenge to the senior team through incisive questioning and careful monitoring of the school's performance.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

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

15 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys, London, SE28 8AT

It really was a great pleasure to inspect your school and for us to meet some of you. You spoke with great enthusiasm about all aspects of the school. You are very proud of it and so you should be. We agreed with all your positive comments and judged the school to be good with some outstanding features. You make good academic progress and you are developing into mature, confident young men.

We have judged the range of subjects you are taught and your personal development to be outstanding. We were particularly impressed by how calm and relaxed the school was. Your behaviour is excellent and you treat each other and your teachers with great respect. So, well done to all of you!

The school has very high expectations and is aiming to be outstanding. To achieve this we have asked the school to improve in one area:

- use a greater range of strategies in the classroom to make sure that all students make even better progress, particularly the more able students and those who are learning English as an additional language.

You can do your part by letting teachers know when you don't quite understand or when you are ready to do harder work.

Congratulations to you and all the staff on the outcome of this inspection.

I wish all of you the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Lynes

Her Majesty's Inspector