

Welling School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101467
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307696
Inspection dates	22–23 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1541
6th form	136
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms W Perfect
Headteacher	Mrs D Khanna
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2006
School address	Elsa Road Welling DA16 1LB
Telephone number	020 8304 8531
Fax number	020 8301 6414

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than the average secondary school and serves an area where a significant percentage of pupils attend nearby grammar schools. It has been designated as a specialist visual arts college and training school. A lower than average proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and an average percentage have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than usually found. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties is above average and current data show a steadily upward trend. At the time of the previous inspection, the school was given a Notice to Improve which required it to make significant improvements in relation to students' attainment and the quality of teaching and learning especially in Years 7 - 9. At the start of the spring term 2008, a new executive principal and an interim headteacher were appointed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Since being given a Notice to Improve at the time of the last inspection, the school has made very limited progress towards the identified areas for improvement. Inspectors do not agree with the school's judgment that it is now effective. There are severe weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning which do not enable students to make up for previous underachievement. Standards remain significantly below average across some key subjects including science and mathematics. Assessment and tracking data are not used effectively to plan lessons and challenge students to achieve as well as possible. Attendance remains a serious concern and levels have not significantly changed since the previous inspection. Although a little improved since a year ago, students are still not making enough progress during their time at Welling School. The school provides inadequate value for money and leaders across the school are not currently demonstrating the capacity to improve.

Overall, students behave satisfactorily. They show respect to and value those teachers who provide them with interesting lessons and challenge them to learn well. However, too much teaching is inadequate and a significant number of students respond by misbehaving and wasting their time. This in turn has an impact on other students whose learning is interrupted. Concerned parents who feel that they have not been involved sufficiently in the work of the school also voiced this. Some also complain that their communication with the school goes unanswered.

The new executive principal, a member of the National Leader of Education, and the interim headteacher are enthusiastic and dynamic individuals who are absolutely determined to bring about the rapid improvement required. They have plans to involve a 'National Support School' in order to make the required progress and ensure sustainability. They have already begun the process of motivating and revitalising the senior leadership team. Some new systems are already in place to enable leaders and managers to improve their monitoring of students' progress. Leaders have been assigned areas of responsibility and have a clear notion of what they have to do to now to ensure swift improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school has an effective sixth form. Recently, fewer students have chosen to continue with their studies in the sixth form and retention rates have fallen. Students who do remain at Welling express their satisfaction with both their progress and the fact that they are 'treated like young adults'. Facilities for private study and access to computers are inadequate. Although standards fell in 2007, students' progress over time is satisfactory. They do consistently well in applied art and drama but less well in business and English. Teaching and learning are mainly satisfactory but there is insufficient monitoring of both teaching and students' progress. The curriculum is satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection, plans were in place to increase the breadth of the curriculum but this has not happened.

Relationships are good and sixth formers say that teachers are approachable and supportive but attendance is unsatisfactory. Although sixth formers play an active part in the school council and contribute to the life of the school as prefects, opportunities to develop their personal skills and understanding are insufficient. Arrangements to induct students into the sixth form are good and students appreciate the guidance they receive when applying to university. The school works well with partner schools and other institutions. Recently, students' targets have been more realistic and sixth form leaders have introduced a system to monitor their progress more carefully. They now have a sound understanding of what is required to improve the effectiveness of the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards across the school in English, mathematics and science.
- Take immediate steps to eradicate inadequate teaching and underachievement.
- Strengthen governance to ensure that the governing body holds the school to account for its performance effectively.
- Ensure that leadership and management at all levels bring about the rapid improvements required.
- Improve the facilities for private study and access to computers in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

At the end of Year 11, standards remain below average. The percentage of students obtaining 5 or more A*–C grades at GCSE including mathematics and English has not improved since the last inspection and is well below national averages. Higher attaining students do not make the progress they should. There were no A* or A grades in English in last summer's results and the proportion in many other subjects was low. Overall, progress in many subjects has declined. Only English sustains achievement across the school so that pupils make satisfactory progress when compared to similar schools. Overall progress from the beginning of Year 10 to the end of Year 11 remains low. The apparent good progress in mathematics at this time is based on the legacy of underachievement present lower down the school.

There have been some improvements in attainment in English and science made by Year 9 students since the last inspection, but these are from a low base. Standards remain significantly below average, particularly in mathematics. There has been some improvement in students' achievement in science and mathematics over the last three years and they now achieve satisfactorily in English. However, the overall progress students make during Years 7 to 9 remains significantly below that expected from pupils with similar backgrounds. Progress in science has been particularly poor and a very low percentage of students make the expected levels of progress after leaving primary school.

The school missed the targets set by the local authority in 2007. Targets for 2008 are demanding and the more robust systems currently being put in place will show more accurately the progress that is being made.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students say that they enjoy school when 'Teachers make lessons more fun.' They like these lessons because 'These teachers are enthusiastic and want to be here.' Overall, behaviour is satisfactory although students go on to say, 'Behaviour is not good in certain lessons' and the view of parents is articulated in the words of one who wrote, 'The minority of students are spoiling the learning of the majority.' Students who compromise the safety and learning of others are excluded and the exclusion rate remains high. However, the number of those excluded for a day or two, as a deterrent, is diminishing because of the success of the seclusion area in school. Attendance figures are well below average and remain an area of concern. This is the same picture as at the time of the last inspection. Senior managers are only now beginning to understand what they need to do to make an impact on attendance and have now made it more of an important focus for students and teachers.

Some progress has been made since the last inspection in the delivery of spiritual moral, social and cultural education. Students show sensitivity to other cultures, are respectful of other beliefs and have opportunities to reflect in assemblies. Students think that school meals are, 'OK' and that they have improved. School council members are pleased that the canteen manager keenly attends their meetings to share ideas about healthy menus. Their understanding of healthy lifestyles is restricted by insufficient personal, social and health education. They do say that they feel safe, that bullying is dealt with quickly and that they can talk to the school's nurse, their tutor or head of year about problems. Students contribute well to the community inside and outside school, in helping children in primary schools, elderly people in the locality and as mentors to younger students in school. Students value their responsibilities as prefects and council members. Their continuing low levels of basic skills in mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT) hinder their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

The last inspection report judged that teaching was inadequate. The executive principal and interim headteacher have recently conducted their own observations and confirm that this is still the case. Inspection evidence found that a third of lessons are not good enough. Many of these are in science, mathematics and ICT. Too much teaching is poorly planned and does not meet the needs of a high percentage of students. This is because teachers do not assess the pupils' learning adequately and build on what they already know. Too many teachers do not challenge the students enough or manage their behaviour well. Students and parents say that some teachers 'cannot control their lessons'. Teaching does not enable pupils to make the amount of progress needed to achieve higher standards or to make up for previous underachievement. There are examples of good teaching in all year groups, where teachers have planned well, set a fast pace and have used practical activities imaginatively. In lessons like these, pupils of all abilities enjoy learning and participate enthusiastically in discussion and activities. Work is marked regularly in humanities subjects, with useful guidance on how to improve, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is broadly satisfactory and the school is beginning to try out a number of ways of improving it. In Years 10 and 11 most students currently follow an academic course leading to GCSE and only a few pupils take vocational courses in partnership with local colleges. Senior staff know that the school needs to extend vocational courses and activities which prepare pupils for their working life. They are planning to do this by expanding vocational opportunities and allowing students to take a mixture of vocational and academic subjects. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is being developed appropriately to place more emphasis on helping pupils to acquire better basic literacy and numeracy skills. The impact of this is not yet evident in higher standards. Pupils enjoy a good range of extra-curricular activities particularly in the arts where they have access to an unusually wide range of exciting arts and media projects. The links with local and national arts organisations are very strong. The school's specialist status is having a positive impact on the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The move to this school from pupils' primary schools is well thought through. This helps students to settle in quickly and to feel safe. In the words of one parents, 'My child has been at the school for one year and she has made lots of friends'. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make better progress than their classmates because of the good range of support given to meet their particular needs. The school does not yet have multi agency discussions but welcomes the good support it receives for those with behavioural needs. Support for pupils with speech and language difficulties is insufficient. Those pupils most at risk, children in public care and the vulnerable are well supported through good liaison with social workers and carers. In addition, particular teaching assistants are specially trained to support students who themselves are carers.

Careers' guidance is praised by the students. They report that they usually receive their option choices. However, most choose not to stay here for their sixth form studies. The quality of their understanding of targets is variable. Most record a number or letter but the meaning of this information is not clear to many students. Neither are they clear about the level of the work they are doing in lessons or how to improve it and. The marking of their work is inconsistent and in many cases unhelpful.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management, including governance are inadequate. Inspectors found that the school has been pursuing too many initiatives and priorities. This has resulted in senior leaders' lack of focus on the areas for improvement raised by the previous inspection; progress towards these has been inadequate. Leaders have not succeeded in sufficiently raising achievement

and the quality of teaching and learning with the required urgency. Governors have not rigorously held the school to account for its performance. The senior leadership team has yet to demonstrate the ability to support middle managers in tackling underachievement. This is because they have not been given clear directions. Until now, school self-evaluation has been too generous because leaders did not have a clear idea of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The new executive principal and interim headteacher recognise the shortcomings present in the school and the lack of progress towards the issues identified since the last inspection. They have already put in place some clear systems to address this. For example, new tracking systems are simple and fit for purpose and procedures introduced to monitor teaching and learning mean that inadequate teaching is being challenged appropriately. It is too early to see evidence of the impact of these systems and procedures on the achievement of the students. Other senior leaders and the governing body are beginning to understand what the school needs to do to improve.

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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	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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3

Achievement and standards

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	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?	3	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?	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	4
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	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

25 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Welling School, Welling, DA16 1LB

As you know, we have recently inspected your school and I am writing to tell you our findings. Thank you for your help. We enjoyed meeting many of you and seeing you at work in lessons. You have lots of opportunities to take part in exciting projects in the arts, but unfortunately there are several important areas where improvement is needed. We have therefore placed your school in 'special measures' because its overall effectiveness is inadequate. This means that the school will get extra support and guidance to help you make the progress that you should much more quickly.

Your teachers want to do their best for you and some of the teaching is good and helps you learn. However, we think that too many of you do not make enough progress by the time you take your GCSEs. After watching your lessons we certainly know you could achieve a lot more. Your teachers need to have higher expectations for what you can achieve. They need to know clearly the level you are working at and give you more guidance on how to improve. You need to do your part by setting yourselves higher personal targets and by following your teachers' advice and instructions. Most of you behave quite well, but quite a few of you misbehave in lessons and stop others from learning. Your attendance is still a big issue; too many of you are still absent too often or are late.

We have asked the school to make sure that:

- you do better in English, mathematics and science
- the teaching is improved and helps you achieve far more
- the leaders, governors and staff work more effectively together to make the improvements needed quickly so that you achieve much better results.

We hope that you will do well in the future and, with the help of the school, realise your ambitions. I look forward to seeing your results next summer.

Glynis Bradley-Peat

Lead Inspector