

West Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106274
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	309080
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Janet Palmer HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	847
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr S Fildes
Headteacher	Mr R Hewitt
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2005
School address	Thompson Cross Stamford Street Stalybridge Cheshire SK15 1LX
Telephone number	0161 338 2193
Fax number	0161 338 8293

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

West Hill is a slightly smaller than average school which became a specialist science college in September 2004. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is much lower than the national average and few students are at the early stages of learning English. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is low. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is highly oversubscribed and students' attendance is higher than the national average. The school population is stable with few boys leaving or entering the school outside of the usual starting and leaving dates. The school holds awards for Investors in People and National Healthy Schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

West Hill is a good school with some outstanding features. The headteacher and senior leaders successfully instil and maintain the school's ethos of respect, responsibility and a positive attitude to learning. Together, the staff work hard to raise achievement and maintain the school's good reputation.

Standards are consistently above the national average and students make good progress during their time at the school. In national tests in 2007, students made good progress at Key Stage 3 and achieved broadly in line with national expectations at Key Stage 4. Current school data, including the early entry GCSE grades attained by students in Year 11, indicate that progress at both key stages, is now good. Results are particularly good in mathematics and science at Key Stage 4, reflecting the school's specialist science college status. Students also perform very well in art and design and in English literature.

Achievement is good because teaching is effective. Teachers have good subject knowledge and motivate the boys to do their best. In turn, the boys are keen and responsive, and make the most of their learning opportunities. Robust systems are in place to track students' academic progress. However, the quality of marking is variable and students do not always receive guidance on how to improve their work.

Relationships in the classroom and around the school are positive. The great majority of boys enjoy school and are proud to be a part of West Hill. In collaboration with local colleges, the school provides a good selection of academic and vocational options at Key Stage 4. The academic curriculum is well supported by an outstanding range of enrichment activities including many sports, performing arts, clubs and educational trips. The student council plays an active part in decision-making on key issues affecting the life of the school. Council members are eloquent about the benefits of organising and managing a budget and the democratic process of consultation and representation. All students in Year 11 have an opportunity to be a school prefect and successful students receive appropriate training which is highly valued.

The school provides good care and support. There are excellent partnerships with a wide network of outside agencies to support students' social development and well-being. The effectiveness of this is evident in the good progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the outstanding contributions the majority of boys make to the local and wider community. Aspects of prejudice and discrimination are addressed within the curriculum, but an in-depth awareness of the range of diversity issues is lacking, resulting in occasional insensitive attitudes and behaviour.

The school leaders and governors have clearly identified roles that are focused on helping students achieve their potential across a broad range of outcomes. They are providing good value for money and there is a good capacity for the school to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of marking to ensure that students understand their targets and how to improve, in all subjects.
- Raise the awareness of diversity issues.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

During their time at West Hill, students achieve well and attain standards that are above the national average. Students enter the school having reached standards that are broadly in line with the national average. They make good progress as they move through the school and, by the end of Year 9, attain results in national tests that are above the national average. Results obtained in the specialist subjects of science and mathematics have been consistently good at both key stages and, in 2007, particularly good progress was made in English. In recent years progress through Years 10 and 11 has been satisfactory and the percentage achieving higher grades in GCSE examinations, including in English and mathematics, have remained above the national average.

There has been a steady upward trend in students' performance since the school achieved specialist science college status and there is strong evidence that strategies to raise achievement are working. The current Year 11 are making good progress with results already obtained in external examinations confirming rising standards. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development of students is good overall. The boys are helped to take responsibility for their actions and develop independence. Their moral, social and spiritual development is good and their cultural awareness is supported by a range of visits and activities.

Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons is good and, at times, exemplary. Older boys take up the many opportunities to help and support younger boys. Students have a good understanding of the importance of demonstrating racial equality but have a less sophisticated awareness of the wider issues of diversity. The school monitors incidents of poor behaviour and is in the process of further improving the system to support better analysis of both behaviour and progress. Whilst the overwhelming majority of parents feel their child is safe and well cared for in the school, a small minority expressed concerns about incidents of bullying.

Attendance is good with present levels being above the national average. Those students who have been absent from school for a significant amount of time are well supported on their return in the learning support unit. Students learn to manage risks in their lives through exploration of issues in the Individual Development Programme and through the many additional enrichment activities. The school offers healthy eating options and ensures students understand how to pursue a healthy lifestyle. Students develop a clear understanding of the importance of managing their money in the future and develop very good enterprise skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The school has addressed the issue about subject expertise effectively since the last inspection.

The strong features of teaching include stimulating presentations that capture students' imagination and lessons that move along quickly. Most students know what is expected of

them, and are given challenging work which matches their abilities. Teachers and support assistants work well together and this has a notably good impact on the progress made by students with learning difficulties. An excellent example of teaching and learning was seen in a Year 9 mathematics lesson. Students were very excited about their work as they tried to identify and calculate the natural occurrence of ratios in familiar human faces. The fun they had in learning as they tried to develop theories about certain facial ratios associated with beauty was matched only by the excellent progress they made.

There are usually good opportunities for students to evaluate their own and each others' work. In the best examples of marking, teachers provide helpful comments for improvement and ensure that students understand their targets. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent and does not always enhance learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good overall with outstanding extra-curricular provision. The school has made some very good improvements in academic options since the last inspection. The range of practical subjects has increased considerably and the vocational curriculum is developing well; a significant number of students take part in college-based courses in areas such as motor mechanics and catering. The specialist college status in science is clearly visible in much of what the school has to offer. The 'science week' includes lectures about cosmonauts, and educational visits include the chance to attend seminars on astronomy and see chemical science in practice at a petrochemical plant. Along with well managed work-related experiences and chances to develop enterprise skills, these factors help to ensure that students are exceptionally well prepared for the future.

There is much enrichment through the before-and after-school activities. Students speak highly of clubs such as computers, chess and literacy support. The many opportunities for sports have helped students excel in a number of sporting arenas. Opportunities in practical subjects such as science and food technology include a good emphasis on safety matters.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support for the personal development of students are good. Arrangements for safeguarding are sound. Health and safety procedures are well managed and systems for risk assessment, including those for out of school visits, are secure. The needs of all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those in public care, are well provided for through the learning support unit, in partnership with local agencies and children's services.

Students are kept informed about their attainment levels but this is not yet embedded fully in marking. Students are well informed of their future options by a good range of information and advice in relation to courses and programmes.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The senior leadership team and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Systematic whole-school and departmental self-evaluation has ensured that issues from the previous inspection have been effectively tackled and challenging targets have been set to raise standards.

Partnerships with other education providers, outside agencies and the wider community are outstanding. Links developed through the specialist science college in particular, provide students with extensive opportunities to enhance their learning. Specialist college status has also enabled the upgrading of facilities for science and information and communication technology. Resources are well used to improve outcomes and secure good value for money. However, the library facilities are no better than satisfactory.

The governing body discharges its responsibilities effectively. Governors are well informed and take a full and active part in the strategic development of the school. They are very supportive of the leadership and offer sufficient levels of challenge.

The school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The great majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school and many praise the leadership of the headteacher and senior team.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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	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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	1

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 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 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	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

Inspection of West Hill School, Stalybridge, SK15 1LX

I would like to thank you for welcoming me and the other inspectors to your school and being so friendly and courteous. I appreciate the time many of you gave to tell us about your work and other activities. These were the things that I found out during my visit.

- The school is well led and managed by the headteacher and senior team and provides you with a good education.
- The curriculum is well suited to your needs and interests; lessons are interesting and your teachers have high expectations of your work and behaviour.
- The school's extra-curricular provision is outstanding and you make the most of the many and varied enrichment opportunities.
- Your attendance and attitudes are good; behaviour is often exemplary.
- Your teachers provide good care and support. Students who are vulnerable or need extra help are well catered for.
- Many of you take on important responsibilities through the student council or as prefects and peer mentors.
- You make good progress during your time at school, particularly in the specialist areas of science and mathematics.

We have recommended that the school works to improve the consistency of marking so that you have a clear understanding of your targets and how to improve; and raises your awareness of diversity issues.