

Woodkirk High Specialist Science School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108082
Local Authority	Leeds
Inspection number	309592
Inspection dates	14–15 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Judy Jones

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1759
6th form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Fisher
Headteacher	Mr J White
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Rein Road Tingley Wakefield West Yorkshire WF3 1JQ
Telephone number	0113 368140
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average, serving the urban area of Morley and Tingley, some six miles south of Leeds. Most students are of White British heritage, and about 5% are from other minority ethnic heritages, mainly Asian or British Indian and Pakistani. A very small number are at the early stages of speaking English. The proportion of students with special educational needs is below average, as is the proportion entitled to free school meals. Students' socio-economic backgrounds are average overall, although the proportion whose parents have experience of further or higher education is below average.

The school has been a specialist science college since 2003 and holds the Sportsmark and National Healthy School awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school in which good pastoral support enables students to develop good personal skills. Students of all ages feel safe, and are encouraged to lead healthy lives. Their good behaviour in lessons and around the school is due to the school's clear systems and guidance, and as a result, students enjoy lessons and the wide range of other activities. They make a good contribution to the school and the wider community. Links with other institutions, particularly with local universities, colleges and primary schools are strong and help to widen students' and teachers' educational experience, to the benefit of all. Parents think highly of the school and praise the care it gives to their children.

Students make satisfactory progress in their studies. Standards on entry are above average, and remain above average throughout Key Stage 3. In 2007 standards were only average at the end of Key Stage 4. This was due to inadequate achievement, particularly by lower attaining students, which the leadership team is working hard and effectively to correct. A new leadership team, which has evaluated the school's performance accurately, has taken well considered action to raise the aspirations of teachers as well as students, with the clear message that every student, not just the more able, should achieve well. Students in the current Years 10 and 11 are now achieving satisfactorily and reaching above average standards. Preparation for their economic well-being is satisfactory. Year 9 students are making satisfactory progress towards their end-of-year tests. Challenging targets have been set for the school and for individual students in all their subjects. As a result, students are becoming used to evaluating their work and seeing how to improve. Most teachers are responding well to the demanding targets and teaching is satisfactory overall with a significant amount of good teaching and almost no unsatisfactory teaching. The positive response is due to an intensive and continuing training programme set up by the leadership team to make teaching effective enough to raise the achievement of all. Some lessons, however, are led too much by teachers without enough opportunity for students to work independently.

The satisfactory curriculum covers requirements and has recently been improved by the addition of an alternative GCSE science course and the option to take media studies as an additional qualification. Although there are a few skills-based courses, the curriculum is limited to mainly academic studies and does not give a wide enough choice to meet the needs of all students fully.

The headteacher provides clear educational direction and is well supported by the newly structured leadership team. Senior leaders are effective at supporting middle leaders and at holding them accountable. The systems for monitoring the school's effectiveness are not detailed or efficient enough. The impact of the science specialism is seen in the full range of science courses and in the productive links with primary schools. The school has satisfactory capacity to improve, and gives satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students in the sixth form receive a satisfactory quality of education. In 2007, standards were below average at both AS and A level. In relation to their starting points, students underachieved significantly in several subjects. The school has put much effort into tackling these issues and

recent monitoring shows that students are now making satisfactory progress towards their targets at AS and A level.

Students enjoy the sixth form. They are well cared for and they appreciate the support given to them by their subject teachers and tutors. The good personal development of the students is reflected in their caring attitudes and involvement in the school community. They are good role models, helping younger students with their reading and mentoring others to help them improve.

Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory, though the quality varies across subjects. Independent learning is not sufficiently developed and many students are still too reliant upon their teachers. The curriculum is predominantly academic and for some students this is too narrow. However, study modules prepare students for their future lives and there are additional study opportunities for the more able. Students enjoy a wide variety of enrichment activities.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. New systems for monitoring students' progress and giving appropriate academic guidance have led to a rise in recent module results, though the school realises that there is still room for improvement. There are good links with other colleges and universities that broaden students' experiences and prepare them for the next step to work or continued education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise standards and achievement.
- Widen the curriculum to meet the full needs of all students.
- Improve the systems for monitoring the school's effectiveness.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter Year 7 with standards in English, mathematics and science that are above average. Achievement is satisfactory over the three years of Key Stage 3 so that standards are still above average by the end of Year 9. Achievement in mathematics is better than in English and science. In 2007, standards in examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 were average and this group of students made inadequate progress. However, recent changes to the curriculum, coupled with a complete overhaul of the way in which the school sets all its targets is bringing about improvement so that achievement is rising and is now satisfactory. This is evident from the GCSE results for those Year 11 students who have taken some examinations early and from the predicted results for the remaining examinations. In particular, the underachievement of a significant number of lower and middle ability students has been eliminated. Standards in the current Year 11 are above average overall. The school met its specialist subject target for mathematics in 2007 but missed it in science. A new applied science course is proving effective in enabling a large group of students to achieve satisfactorily. The integration of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who have English as an additional language enables them to make satisfactory progress in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Attendance is above average. Students enjoy school, and behaviour in lessons and around the site is good. Students feel safe in school and know what to do and who to turn to when they feel at risk. Bullying and racist incidents are rare. When they do occur, they are quickly and effectively resolved. Students enjoy healthy lifestyles through the recommended two hours per week of physical education, and over 40% participate in extra-curricular sport. Freshly prepared and nutritious school meals are increasingly popular. Spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good. Students know right from wrong and an extensive programme of trips and visits contributes to their social development and broadens their cultural awareness. Assemblies, and the 'thought for the day' give students opportunities to reflect, to which they respond well. Many students get involved in the life and work of the school community, for example as school councillors, contributing to the appointment of senior staff and through fund-raising events for charity. Older students support the learning of younger pupils including those at local primary schools. Opportunities to develop enterprise skills help prepare students satisfactorily for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students learn well in lessons where they are actively involved in their learning. The best lessons are those in which, for example, they work collaboratively or learn how to improve by matching their own and others' work to examination criteria. However, a significant number of lessons that are broadly satisfactory are still heavily dominated by the teacher. In these, students do not take decisions or work independently and progress is satisfactory rather than good in spite of students' willingness to learn. In such lessons there are too few opportunities for teaching assistants to help those in need so some of their time is wasted.

Learning objectives in many lessons are clear and guide the learning, but some merely describe what happens next, with less emphasis on what it is intended that students will learn. Many teachers use information and communication technology well to illustrate ideas and stimulate learning through exciting visual simulations or interactive activities, but not all teachers get the best out of interactive whiteboards.

Teachers give plenty of verbal and written feedback to students, and increasingly set subject and individual targets based on accurate assessment of students' progress. Many exercise books show frequent and continuous assessment, establishing a productive dialogue with pupils and encouraging them to track their own progress, but marking in some subjects is sketchy.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The satisfactory curriculum meets statutory requirements. However, in Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is biased in favour of academic subjects. The school has recognised this and is now working to improve the opportunities for more vocational courses to meet better the individual needs of all students. The current Year 9 students have had a wider choice of academic and vocational courses than was available previously. Early entry to GCSE examinations is allowing students either to broaden their achievement through the study of further courses or to resit the examinations to improve their grades. The influence of the science specialism is seen in the wide choice of science courses offered to meet the whole range of needs, from three separate sciences to applied science, but does not make a significant contribution to other subjects. A limited alternative curriculum is provided in Years 10 and 11 for those students better suited to skills-based learning.

A wide range of well attended extra-curricular and enrichment activities, including some in sport and the performing arts, widen students' experiences. Students have the opportunity to develop their financial and teamwork skills through an enterprise week.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Good relationships between staff and students create a supportive and inclusive atmosphere throughout the school. Lessons in science and elsewhere deal effectively with substance abuse and sexual health risks. The school meets statutory requirements to ensure the safety and well-being of all pupils, and students know who to turn to for help and advice.

Recently introduced systems allow teachers to track students' progress and identify underachievement. Teachers then set students fresh targets, supporting them with various strategies, including more guidance with coursework and increased involvement of parents. Year 11 students appreciate the support of their personal mentors. Wherever possible, students are encouraged to reflect on their own progress. However, these strategies are still too new to be fully effective in maximising students' achievement.

Teachers use commendations and sanctions effectively, to maintain students' involvement in their work. The school makes satisfactory provision for the few students who arrive knowing little English. Staff identify the needs of vulnerable students, giving strong support to them and their families. Thoughtful induction processes help new students to settle in. Older students now get effective advice about the courses they choose. The expertise of many external agencies is utilised to beneficial effect for students with individual needs.

Care, guidance and support in the sixth form are satisfactory and improving, but the school recognises the need to increase the rigour of academic support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management at all levels are satisfactory. The newly constituted leadership team has focused on the need to improve the achievement of all students rather than just those likely to achieve higher GCSE grades. The clear direction of the headteacher has ensured that other leaders now share his vision and are implementing the strategies that are already raising standards and achievement, particularly of the lower attainers. Effective training on the use of data means that all staff now understand the concept of adding value for all students. Teaching is now being monitored and support provided where necessary to eliminate inconsistencies and to spread good practice. Strategic planning for the future focuses on priorities identified through accurate self-evaluation.

The newly formed leadership team is highly committed and all share a common sense of purpose. Senior leaders have a good understanding of what the school needs to do to improve and have had a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning. However, middle leaders are less clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses as their monitoring of its work is relatively new and lacks rigour. A committed team of governors understands the school and recognises the need to improve achievement. As a result, governors are providing satisfactory support and challenge to the school.

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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?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

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	2	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	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	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	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	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	3	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Woodkirk High Specialist Science School, Wakefield,
WF3 1JQ

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in such a friendly school where students work so well together. You are developing into responsible and confident young people and you value the care and kindness given so willingly by all the adults in the school. We appreciated the time you gave to tell us what it is like to be a student at Woodkirk and found your comments helpful in identifying the strengths of the school and what needs to be improved.

Your school is satisfactory. It provides you with a safe and happy environment where you can enjoy your lessons and the many extra activities. Teaching is satisfactory and as a result, you make satisfactory progress, both in the main school and in the sixth form. In order to help the school improve further, we have asked your headteacher to do three things:

- make sure you are encouraged to work independently and find things out for yourselves in lessons rather than being told the information you have to learn
- widen the choices of subjects and courses available to you
- improve the systems through which the school monitors its effectiveness so they are more detailed and efficient.

You can help with the first of these by trying hard to work independently whenever the opportunity arises.

We wish you every success in the future.