

# Wootton Upper School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109710
<b>Local Authority</b>	BEDFORDSHIRE LA
<b>Inspection number</b>	310075
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 October 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jennifer Brown HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1222
6th form	358
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr John Warwick
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Tony Withall
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 January 2004
<b>School address</b>	Hall End Road Wootton Bedford Bedfordshire MK43 9HT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01234767123
<b>Fax number</b>	01234765203

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<b>Age group</b>	13-18
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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Wootton Upper School is a popular 13–18 specialist arts college of larger than average size. It obtained specialist status in 2002 and has just gained re-designation. A large majority of the students are White British and the proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. Student's attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just below the national average and the proportion with statements of special educational need is well below.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Wootton Upper is a very good school with outstanding features. Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection and are well above average at Key Stage 4. The school's specialist arts status has a positive impact on raising standards. Although students make good progress in most subject areas between the ages of 14 and 16, this is not a consistent feature in science. The headteacher and senior managers are very strongly focused on improving and maintaining the high standards attained by students at the school. Monitoring and evaluation of student achievement is a well-embedded aspect of the school's performance monitoring processes. Line management arrangements have been strengthened. Middle managers are committed to improving standards and achievement, but, in a small number of departments, systems are not sufficiently sound, consequently targets are not always met nor sufficiently high standards achieved.

Parents hold the school in very high regard, as summed up by one parent, 'The school has an excellent ethos and encourages and brings out the best in all students'. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding throughout the school and they speak highly of the exemplary support and guidance they receive. Students are thoughtful, supportive of each other and show respect and consideration for others with diverse backgrounds, views and interests. As a result they feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Their standard of behaviour is good; a feature strongly endorsed by parents, and attendance is good and improving. Sixth form students are very good role models and are actively involved in supporting younger students and those who are more vulnerable.

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well structured and teachers enjoy very good relationships with their students. The level of challenge in lessons is usually appropriate to the ability of the students, but lesson plans rarely identify how teaching will meet the needs of students of differing abilities.

Curriculum provision is outstanding. The curriculum is broad and meets the needs of all abilities of students. Links and partnership arrangements with other providers are excellent. The specialist arts status of the school has been influential in extending curricular and extra-curricular provision. Strong links have been developed with the community through performance activities both for and within the community.

The school has made good improvements since the last inspection. It knows itself exceptionally well, has a strong capacity to improve and provides good value for money.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The school has a good sixth form that has some outstanding features. A large proportion of Year 11 choose to join the sixth form and a significant number of students enter from other schools. Students are well motivated and enjoy their studies very much. Many students are actively involved in the school community, willingly taking on responsibilities such as the sixth form council and acting as peer mentors to other students. Standards at AS and A-level are above average and improving and students currently achieve well. Performance in examinations has increased since last year.

Teaching in the sixth form is good and in some cases exemplary. Students are very pleased with the level of help they receive from teachers. Teachers use assessment extremely effectively to

guide and motivate students. The curriculum is good, providing a wide range of options to match the abilities and aspirations of most students. However, there are relatively few vocational subjects on offer. The school does not meet its post-16 statutory requirements for religious education.

The sixth form is led well and enhancements to the leadership have already made a difference to the sixth form effectiveness. In past years, provision and achievement have been satisfactory. The increased level of support from tutors and sixth form leaders is contributing significantly to considerable improvement. Every opportunity is taken to track students' achievement, offer further support after school and ensure students are clear about expectations.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards and achievement in science at Key Stage 4 to the level of the other core subject areas.
- Ensure teachers plan for and implement strategies to match work to the ability of all students, including those of higher ability.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The standards students attain by age 16 are very high overall. Information provided by the school shows that standards continue to be very high in most subject areas in 2007. The percentage of students attaining 5A\*- C grades, including English and mathematics, is well above the national average. However, the attainment of students in 2007 in science is below the national average and has consistently been below the high standards attained in other areas such as English and mathematics for the last three years. Successful actions to reduce the differences in performance between boys and girls are in place; however, boys still failed to achieve as many higher grades in 2007. Standards in the specialist subject areas are all above or in line with national averages, but the school was disappointed that staffing difficulties prevented it from meeting the demanding targets it set itself in these areas. The progress students make between the ages of 14 and 16 has been very good, but is good in 2007 mainly due to underperformance in science.

Information provided by the school indicates standards at age 14 continue to be above average and the progress made by students is good. The progress of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is good and they are very well supported. The progress students make in lessons is dependant on the quality of teaching. In some lessons students of all abilities are not provided sufficient challenge.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding throughout the school and contribute well to their achievement. They are supportive of their school and their enjoyment of learning is evident in many lessons.

Students feel very safe in the school. They report that bullying and racist incidents are rare and that the school takes prompt and effective action when they occur. Students follow instructions,

work safely, understand the requirements of and generally adopt healthy lifestyles. Their participation in sporting activities is high. Students' social, emotional and cultural development is very good. There is a comprehensive programme of personal, health and social education and citizenship. Outside agencies, visiting experts and peer coaching by trained sixth form students enrich and augment this programme.

The specialist school status provides many opportunities for students to contribute positively to the local and school communities. The school council plays an active part in school life and its members take their responsibilities very seriously. Students know that the school listens to their views and students of all ages are involved in governor committees.

The school prepares students very well for their future lives. Students take full advantage of the many opportunities available to undertake additional responsibilities, which enable them to develop their learning and teamwork skills. Core skill standards are high and work experience is often a key point in their maturing process.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school has accurately assessed the quality of teaching and learning; most of which is good and some of which is outstanding. Teachers and pupils get on together very well and this creates a suitable environment for effective learning and good progress to be made. Most teachers use questioning skilfully to check the level of student understanding. In some lessons teaching is not sufficiently targeted at students' differing needs and levels of attainment, so that they are not always appropriately challenged. Students' behaviour in lessons is good; they work well independently, in pairs and in small groups. Assessment information is used very effectively to help teachers and students identify areas of weakness and set targets for success. However, the quality of marking varies; at its best it contributes well to students' overall progress by providing them with ways of improving their performance.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Accreditation as a specialist arts college contributes greatly to the high quality of the curriculum, particularly in the areas of music, drama and dance. Outstanding partnerships are established with a wide range of providers, including the local college and work based learning providers. These increase choices at Key Stage 4 and ensure the needs of all students, including the most vulnerable, are met. A wide range of academic and vocational options broadens progression routes into post-16 education and training. Students are enthusiastic about the wide range of extra-curricular activities they can take part in, both sporting and cultural. These include cultural visits to theatres, the hosting of dance and music, several artists-in-residence and being involved in performances, as either a participant or a member of the audience.

## Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students speak very highly of the exemplary care, guidance and support they receive throughout the school. Student concerns are dealt with swiftly and there are stringent systems in place for child protection. Procedures for safeguarding students' health and safety are thorough and the school routinely elicits students' views on matters that affect them. Strong and effective links with feeder schools ensure that transfer is as smooth as possible and students settle in quickly. Careful monitoring of student progress results in the identification of their needs at an early stage. Support for students with particular needs, including the more able and talented, is very effective. Information gained through rigorous assessment is used to set challenging targets and students are kept informed of their progress. Very good systems are in place to ensure that students get good quality information and guidance about the next stage in their education and about careers.

## Leadership and management

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The headteacher and the senior team provide a very clear direction and an outstanding sense of purpose in striving for continual improvement. Effective use of challenging targets has resulted in significant increases in standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 4 in most subjects, as well as outstanding provision of care and students' personal development. Self-evaluation, supported by a very thorough analysis of examination performance, is excellent and leads to very clear planning for future development. Staff, governors and students are involved in the practice. Heads of department are held fully accountable for their own subjects and, together with senior leaders, monitor and evaluate teaching and learning accurately and thoroughly. This rigorous process has been a major factor in sustained high standards although further steps are needed to ensure achievement in science matches that in other core subjects. The school maintains a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils although there are variations in the progress and attainment of boys and girls. Governance is good and governors provide strong support and challenge for the school. However they have no processes in place to monitor that the school carries out correct staff vetting procedures. Resources, including finances, are effectively managed overall and available staff used wisely; nevertheless, there remain recruitment difficulties in some areas.

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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?	2	2
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	1	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	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

10 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Wotton Upper School, Wootton, MK43 9HT

Thank you very much for making us so welcome and for the way in which you shared your views with us, both in formal and informal meetings and within lessons. We could see that the relationships between yourselves and the teachers at the school are very good. You told us how much you appreciate and enjoy the sporting activities you can take part in and the activities and performances that occur because the school is a specialist arts college. You attend a very good school and we are certain that Mr Withell and his senior staff have a very clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school has many strengths and we were particularly impressed by:

- the way the school is led the headteacher and senior staff
- the improvements there have been in standards at GCSE since the last inspection
- the thoughtful way you support each other and show respect and consideration for others
- the arrangements the school has with the local college, work- based learning providers and other schools which ensure you have the best opportunities to progress in your academic and personal development
- the exemplary care and support you receive to help you do your best

To make your school even better we have recommended that:

- the standards you achieve in science by the time you are 16 improve so they are at least as good as in other subjects, such as English and mathematics.
- teachers plan their lessons in such a way that the work you are given meets your needs and challenges all of you.

On behalf of the inspection team thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Brown HMI

Lead inspector