

Wexham School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110078
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	310199
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2008
Reporting inspector	William Geoffrey Robson

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	899
Sixth form	155
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S D'Arcy
Headteacher	Mr J Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2004
School address	Norway Drive Slough SL2 5QP
Telephone number	01753 526797
Fax number	01753 573916

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wexham School is a specialist sports college serving a culturally diverse community. It is a non-selective school in an area where there are also selective, or grammar schools. Approximately three quarters of its students are from minority ethnic groups, with the largest proportion being of Asian or Asian British (Pakistani or Indian) background. Over half of the students speak English as an additional language. About a quarter of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Many of these have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, or dyslexia. The school has a resource base for up to 15 students with autism, with the result that the proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is well above average. A high proportion of students are eligible for free school meals. The school is part of a loose federation of three secondary schools in the local area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Wexham School provides a satisfactory education for its students. There is, however, an outstanding feature of the school's work. Over many years, the headteacher has maintained the vision that the school is first and foremost a community of people. He claims that, 'We're developing people who you would want to live next door to.' The outcome is evident in students' outstanding personal development and well-being. Students are rightly proud of their multi-ethnic, multilingual school. As one teacher rightly said, 'All students rub along together extremely well, no matter what their background.' Diversity is highly valued and celebrated, so that students from a wide variety of backgrounds learn to appreciate and value their own and others' cultures. As a result, any tensions between different cultures in the outside world do not affect the excellent relationships in the school. Students willingly take on responsibilities in the school and make an excellent contribution to their local community. They behave well, and are polite and welcoming to teachers and visitors alike, benefiting from the excellent role models provided by staff. Consequently, they feel very safe, trust their teachers and enjoy coming to school. Sports college status ensures that students take advantage of ample opportunities for regular physical activity, and develop healthy lifestyles.

The challenge for the school now is to build further on students' very positive attitudes, to enable them to achieve better. Students enter the school with below average standards. They make satisfactory progress overall, but progress during Years 10 and 11 is slower than in Key Stage 3. After the last inspection, until last year, the progress of these older students was inadequate. The school identified this issue in 2007, and has responded effectively. By identifying underachieving students and implementing a range of strategies to support them, teachers ensured that results in 2008 improved significantly. GCSE results at the end of Year 11 are still below the national average, but this represents satisfactory achievement in the light of students' starting points. Current Year 11 students are on track to achieve similar results.

This recent improvement in standards is an indication of what the school can achieve, given concerted action. Staff are dedicated and enthusiastic. Several teachers have been recognised by senior management as lead practitioners, to research and introduce innovative teaching methods and curriculum projects. Other teachers are very supportive of these initiatives. However, the school's procedures for monitoring and self-evaluation are not rigorous enough to measure the precise impact of these and other developments. For example, the need to encourage students' capacity for independent learning was identified in the last inspection. There is no agreed focus on this when managers monitor teaching and learning. Consequently, although teaching and learning are satisfactory, there has been insufficient progress with this important area for improvement.

Despite this, there have been several successful developments, which show that the school has satisfactory capacity for further improvement. Sixth form provision is now well established. The school's specialist sports status has enhanced curriculum provision and supported the drive to raise standards across the school. It is well led, and students speak enthusiastically about the range of options and extra-curricular opportunities available. Its impact in terms of developing excellent links with the community has been substantial. Specialist status has also been used to drive improvements in teaching and learning. Leaders are working hard to ensure the specialist status supports improvement in all subjects, and there are positive signs that this is beginning to happen.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision for students in the sixth form is good. Many students join the sixth form after Year 11 with levels of attainment that are below the national average. The curriculum provides a range of academic, vocational and applied courses, at different levels of accreditation, which meet these students' needs well. This is shown by the growth in numbers since the sixth form opened, shortly after the last inspection. Moreover, once students begin their courses, the large majority complete them. As a result of good teaching, which often encourages independent learning, they achieve well. They do particularly well in vocational and sports courses. In this respect, they clearly benefit from the school's status as a specialist sports college. Year 12 students make satisfactory progress in AS-level subjects. Those who continue to A level reach broadly average standards, which enable a large majority to continue to higher education - sometimes as the first member of their family to do so. The sixth form is well led and managed. There is a clear focus on developing the curriculum further and increasing the number of students for whom the school can provide. Students receive good support and guidance from teachers. Teachers quickly identify any students who are underachieving and provide extra support when needed. Students are proud to be part of the school. They become articulate, confident young people who genuinely appreciate the work and support of their teachers. In turn, they offer a lot to their own community. They actively participate on the school council and willingly support the learning of younger students in the main school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Provide more opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work more rigorously.

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

Students enter the school with standards that are below the national average. This is partly because the school is in an area where many higher-attaining students attend nearby selective schools. Students make good progress in Years 7 to 9, especially in English and mathematics, so that by the end of Year 9 standards are close to national expectations in these subjects. Those who speak English as an additional language develop their understanding of English well during these years. However, for all students, standards are much lower in science.

Progress is slower during Years 10 and 11. Inadequate progress had resulted in too few students achieving the higher GCSE grades of A* to C in three of the last four years. The school has recognised this and has successfully tackled the problem. GCSE results in 2008 improved significantly because teachers set more challenging targets, identified students who were underachieving, and implemented a range of strategies to support them. Overall standards remained below the national average, but, for the first time, over a third of students gained five or more A* to C grades, in subjects which included English and mathematics. Current Year 11 students are on track to achieve similar results. Some lower-attaining students, especially boys, do not achieve as well as they might, partly because the school does not provide enough

alternatives to GCSE courses. In each year, a few persistent absentees and some students with social and emotional difficulties also achieve less than expected. There is little difference in the achievement of different ethnic groups. Those who speak English as an additional language and students with dyslexia receive the support that they need to make satisfactory progress. Similarly, teachers provide sensitive support for autistic students. Overall, therefore, standards are below average, but students' achievement is now satisfactory and the school reaches its specialist school targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Their understanding and acceptance of different cultures and traditions mean that a harmonious atmosphere pervades the whole school. Students see the school as a friendly, supportive community and want to contribute to it. They do so by assuming responsibility at all levels, for example as form representatives or prefects. The student voice is strong. Those elected to the school and sports councils feel that their views are welcomed, and are very keen to make a positive contribution. Students also make an excellent contribution to the local community. They organise their own projects to raise funds for charity, showing considerable initiative and creativity in the current campaign to raise funds for a senior citizen's party. They also benefit from links with other schools in the federation. In particular, some students have visited partner schools in South Africa.

Judging from the extremely positive attitudes and good behaviour of the students, it is clearly evident that they enjoy coming to school. They feel very safe. All students, when asked, could identify an adult to whom they could turn if anxious or distressed. Year 7 students are delighted to find that they will not be troubled by any bullying or racist comments. Interviews with students reveal that they are aware of the need to lead a healthy lifestyle. They respond with enthusiasm to the wide range of opportunities that the school's specialist sports status offers them. They willingly incorporate physical exercise into their school routine, whether in sports lessons, extra-curricular activities or the use of the outdoor environment at break and lunchtimes. Many Year 11 students go the extra step by supporting the local community as junior sports leaders.

Students' preparation for further study and for the world of work is good overall. Older students enjoy good opportunities for work experience. They are developing skills such as teamwork and a willingness to listen to the views of others, which will serve them well in the world of work. Very few leave school without moving into employment, training or further education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers establish excellent relationships with students and are caring and dedicated. They have secure knowledge of their subjects. Lessons are usually conducted in a harmonious atmosphere characterised by both humour and warmth. Students have such positive attitudes that they respond very enthusiastically when given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. This was seen in a successful Year 10 food technology lesson where students engaged in a question and answer and practical demonstration session with a visiting chef. In drama, a slow start to the lesson was transformed when students worked together with real

focus, to develop their own scene related to themes from Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol'. However, this does not happen enough. Teachers tend to direct activities too much, so that students become passive and over dependent. In these lessons, a lack of pace and challenge means that students cannot make better than satisfactory progress. Teachers' use of assessment is also very inconsistent. They share clear objectives with students but do not always revisit them at the end of lessons. They therefore miss opportunities to enable students to evaluate their own work and that of their classmates. In particular, students do not always recognise precisely what they need to do to reach a higher GCSE grade or National Curriculum level.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum meets statutory requirements. Students view the recent introduction of creative arts positively. The integration of humanities subjects has been a successful innovation, because students enjoy the opportunities to work for extended periods of time in different subject areas. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum meets the needs of many students. However, other students lack a sufficient choice of vocational and work-related courses to meet their needs by serving as alternatives to a full diet of GCSE courses. The school provides outstanding opportunities for students to take an active role in the community. Sports college status is an important driving force behind the large number of enrichment activities that the school provides. Students attend an extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and societies, which contribute strongly to their personal development. A course in personal well-being is run by teachers who have volunteered to lead on specific topics. This further supports students' understanding of how to keep safe and healthy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a strong pastoral system in which all staff are clearly dedicated to the care and welfare of all students. Procedures for safeguarding learners are robust. Staff support vulnerable students well. They ensure that they receive the additional help they require in school and have established effective links with several external support agencies. A good system of induction with primary feeder schools, including visits by prospective students, ensures a smooth transition for Year 7 students. Students who join the school at different times, sometimes with little English, are sensitively nurtured by the learning support department to ensure that their integration into mainstream classes can happen as speedily and effectively as possible. In terms of academic support, a system for data collection and target setting is in place. This ensures that students know their long-term target grades and levels and how they are progressing towards them. However, students are not helped enough to identify achievable, short-term goals which they can review with form tutors on a frequent basis.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has a clear vision that the school has an important contribution to make to social cohesion. It is clearly shared by all staff. Senior managers work well together as a dedicated, supportive team. Together, they have effectively managed the expansion of the school since the last inspection. The sixth form is now firmly established. Plans for new buildings

are coming to fruition, to provide much improved facilities, in particular for the school's sports provision.

Self-evaluation involves all staff but sometimes lacks rigour. Recently, the close monitoring of academic progress has led to successful interventions to support underachieving students. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning is too inconsistent. There are no common standards, or agreed criteria, for lesson observations by senior managers or subject leaders. Middle managers respond well to opportunities to take responsibility and oversee new initiatives. However, they do not have enough guidance about how to evaluate their areas of responsibility. Neither the school development plan nor subsidiary plans have clear enough criteria for success, by which to measure their effectiveness accurately and then set further targets.

The governing body is very supportive of the school. However, because of the lack of precision of some self-evaluation, it is unable to challenge the headteacher and the management team as effectively as it could.

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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	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2

Achievement and standards

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

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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	

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

05 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Wexham School, Slough, SL2 5QP

The inspection team really enjoyed visiting your school recently and we would like to thank you for your warm welcome. You expressed your views very well. It was such a pleasure to see that you all get on well with your teachers and with each other. We think that your willingness to support your own school, and to help each other and people in the local community, is really outstanding. You behave well and take full advantage of the good opportunities that the school provides as a sports college. No doubt you are looking forward to the new buildings being completed, when you should be able to take part in even more sports activities. Your teachers work very hard. They obviously care for you and give you good support and guidance, especially when you struggle with your work. Whereas students in the sixth form make good progress with their work, progress in the main school is satisfactory at the moment. We think that the next step for the school is to make sure that you do even better with your work. Because of this, our main finding is that the school provides you with a satisfactory education.

To make the school even better, we have made the following suggestions for improvement.

- The school should help you to make better progress and gain higher grades, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Staff should provide more opportunities for you to develop the skills of independent learning in lessons, especially in the main school.
- Staff should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school's work more rigorously.

You can also help by continuing to work hard and enjoying your time in school. I feel sure that you will.

With best wishes.

Yours faithfully

William Robson

Lead Inspector