

Wilmslow High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111443
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	310600
Inspection dates	5–6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Gina White HMI

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	1895
6th form	436
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Bennett
Headteacher	Mrs G Bremner
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2003
School address	Holly Road Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 1LZ
Telephone number	01625 526191
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Age group	11-18
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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

This large school is popular and over-subscribed. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below national averages. Students are mostly White British and less than 10% are from Black and minority ethnic groups. Six students are at an early stage of learning English. Special provision for students with specific learning difficulties, hearing impairment and autism is located at the school and the proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is above average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school was awarded sports college status in 2003 and gained a Healthy Schools Award in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wilmslow High School provides a good education for students. The school is very well led and provides an outstanding range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities that contribute significantly to students' personal development and their enjoyment of learning. The school's specialist sports status makes a significant contribution to students' achievement and enjoyment of learning across a wide range of areas including the sixth form. Students' knowledge of health and fitness and their active participation in a wide range of sports makes an excellent contribution to their adoption of healthy lifestyles.

Students consistently reach above average attainment in all key stages. The progress and achievement they make has improved recently in response to a more robust approach by the school in using data. Students requiring greater challenge and support are identified more precisely and, consequently, the majority make good progress. Students' attitudes to learning are good and they have responded well to the more challenging approach in lessons, the wider range of teaching and learning styles that are being employed by teachers, and the good facilities and resources provided. In some subjects there is very good practice developing in teachers' and students' use of computer resources to access learning material, email assignments and use of online discussion groups. This enables students to exchange views, aids revision and allows them to explore aspects of lessons in more depth. Regular review and changes to the curriculum have improved provision for most learners and particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For a minority of students the provision of courses, learning and assessment do not meet their needs effectively and consequently their achievement is low.

Students' personal development and the school's provision for their care, guidance and support are good. Students say that they like their school and enjoy their lessons. Their views are playing an increasingly key role in the school's good self-evaluation processes and contribute to decision making, such as the appointment of senior staff and recent changes to dining facilities and services. Attendance is satisfactory but establishing good attendance is proving difficult to achieve. Holidays taken during term time and weak monitoring and follow up of absence undermines the school's efforts to raise student's achievement further.

The headteacher's leadership is very good and her commitment and determination to improve the school is shared by staff and governors. Governors are supportive of the school; however, they do not currently meet all their responsibilities in respect of having an equality plan and regularly reviewing the impact it has on learners. Leaders and managers are not complacent about the task facing them. The school has made good progress in tackling the issues from the last inspection. The strong leadership and management throughout the school and accurate self-evaluation demonstrate their good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The very large sixth form meets the local demand for a high quality academic provision specialising in GCE advanced level studies. Standards are above average and achievement is outstanding. Leadership and management are outstanding. Systems for monitoring, tracking and setting targets are rigorous and students make very good progress in their academic and personal achievement. Students know what they have to do, enjoy their studies and the good

relationships they have with their teachers. Consequently, retention rates in the sixth form are high. Teachers' expertise and high expectations combined with students' excellent commitment and very well developed learning and study skills make lessons interesting and challenging. The recent introduction of the BTEC National sports course has introduced a new approach to teaching and learning to meet the needs of high achieving sport students. Students develop well in confidence and self-esteem because the course is very well suited to their needs and interests. The curriculum provides exceptionally well for the academic and personal development of students. It is characterised by extensive and high quality enrichment. Visits, work experience and links to local businesses provide students with a good knowledge of enterprise and the world of work. All students receive very good advice and guidance for the next stages of their education. This enables all to move on to education, employment or training. Progression to higher education is good, with many students gaining university places.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance and the rigour with which it is monitored.
- Ensure governors fully discharge their responsibilities in respect of having an equality plan and regularly reviewing the impact it has on learners.
- Improve the progress and achievement of a minority of learners further and ensure methods of learning and provision of courses match their needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Most students enter the school with above average attainment levels. However, a significant number enter the school with below average skills and attitudes. Year 9 students reach above average standards. This pattern has been maintained for several years and many reach higher levels than they are expected to. Students' progress has improved in recent years because of effective action taken by the school. More rigorous analysis of students' performance at the end of the Key Stage 3 tests has led to finely focused teaching to address students' weaknesses. Targets are now challenging and very close attention is paid to students' progress in reaching them. Support for specific students and groups is closely targeted and based upon a thorough knowledge of the needs of each individual. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented make good progress.

Standards at the end of Year 11 are also above average overall. A particular strength is the well above average proportion who reach higher grades in both mathematics and English. The very good impact of the sports college status is reflected in the well above average standards achieved in physical education. Most students leave with appropriate qualifications and all Year 11 students enter education or training. In 2007 students did not achieve the targets the school expected them to. Sharper systems to check students' progress have been introduced. The latest analysis of the progress of Year 10 and 11 students shows they are making good progress against challenging targets.

Standards in the sixth form are above average. A particular strength is the large number of students who reach the highest grades at A level. Students make outstanding progress. This is due to the high expectations of their teachers who provide challenging tasks in lessons. Support for students is unstinting and based upon very good tracking of their progress against challenging targets. Sports college status makes a significant contribution in the sixth form

and is very well demonstrated in the outstanding standards and achievement of students following the BTEC National sports qualification.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students develop good spiritual and cultural awareness through a wide range of classroom activities, thoughtful assemblies, and extra-curricular themed days. Overseas expeditions such as the 'world challenge' programme to Kenya and charity work effectively broaden their cultural understanding. Students' social responsibility and initiative are well developed. They take an active part in school life as council members and peer mentors. Students' behaviour in and around school is good. This is well demonstrated in a calm atmosphere, good levels of consideration for others, and good collaboration within lessons. Sixth form students show great maturity and responsibility as mentors and as role models for younger students. Students are very well prepared with basic skills for the world of work and for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they enjoy positive relationships with students. Teachers are developing a wider range of teaching and learning styles and use them confidently and to very good effect in some lessons to involve students actively in learning. Lessons are mostly very well planned with a clear purpose. This enables students to know and understand what they need to do to be successful. Good use is made of resources in extension activities to provide additional challenge to extend learners. In the best lessons effective use is made of questioning to check students' progress and to challenge their thinking. Sixth form students' demonstrate exceptional commitment to their learning and have developed outstanding research skills in response to greater opportunities for independent learning.

A few lessons are not planned carefully enough or in sufficient detail to help all students learn well. In such lessons students are passive listeners for too long and the pace of learning is slow. Students are guided to assess their own work but this practice is not embedded in the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is regularly adapted and monitored to meet the needs of students. Arrangements for progression to Key Stage 4 and post-16 are good. Students are well informed of their options and many are supported in making the decisions that are right for them. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for the able, gifted and talented is good but a small number of students do not have appropriate courses and provision to fully meet their interests and learning styles. In contrast, the school goes to exceptional lengths to ensure the extensive provision of physical education and sporting activities is well matched to students'

needs and interests. Consequently, all students participate fully. In addition, an impressive range of additional school activities are very well attended. They take place before, during and after school. Many are sport related but students also have opportunities to study extra courses in areas such as French, science, music, dance and art. Talented students who represent the school in sporting and other events receive very good support to manage their additional coaching workload and encouragement to aspire to excellence in their particular specialism. Personal development is promoted well through the personal, social and health education and citizenship lessons and the days devoted to work-related learning and enterprise activity during the year. Literacy skills are given a high priority. Most students are very articulate as speaking skills and the development of technical language are reinforced well in all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Good arrangements for health and safety and safeguarding young people are well established and understood by staff. Students feel safe, secure and valued. The school works very closely with a wide range of agencies to ensure that procedures are in place to support all students, including the most vulnerable children and those with hearing impairment and autism. Procedures to identify any student who needs extra support or help are robust. Teaching assistant support is sensitive, well coordinated, and very effective in promoting the well-being of students. The student managers' team effectively monitors behaviour support for a small number of students. This support is valued by students and is a good feature of the school's work.

The rigorous systems for monitoring progress successfully contribute to students' confidence and self-esteem. Students know their individual targets; they are clear, precise, and provide a good level of challenge. Marking and assessment provide most students with good feedback about how well they are doing, although not all know what they need to do to improve. Parents are well informed about their children's progress and like the 'letters home' celebrating particular achievements.

Most new students settle well to the school and arrangements to support them are very effective. Younger students appreciate the support of the sixth form mentors known as 'Networkers' in the 'One Stop Shop' support base. Older students have the opportunity to discuss their option and career choices with teachers and careers advisors at key points during their time at school. As a result, they are able to make well informed decisions about the next phase of their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school is very well led by the headteacher. She provides clear and purposeful leadership. The commitment and energy of the senior leadership team, staff and governors has been firmly harnessed around a common purpose of raising standards and achievement. This is known throughout the school as 'moving from good to great'. Better analysis and use of data has supported the school in developing greater rigour in setting realistic and challenging targets

to guide improvement. Consequently, expectations of what students should achieve have increased and more challenging targets have been set.

Monitoring systems are well established. Students' views of teaching and learning are beginning to play an important role in the regular checks on the quality of learning and teaching undertaken by senior staff and curriculum leaders. Their views also contribute towards developing a curriculum that meets most students' needs and interests.

Self-evaluation is thorough. Leaders and managers have a good awareness of the school's strengths, and celebrate them, and they have an accurate view of where further development is required. Senior staff provide a clear set of priorities to guide the school's development. This, in turn, is underpinned by detailed subject plans. Improvements in students' achievement, particularly in science and mathematics in the last two years and the good progress students currently make demonstrate their effectiveness.

Governors are supportive and well informed about the school. They exercise challenge through questioning and make informed decisions. However, they do not fully meet all of their responsibilities to promote equality. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Leaders and managers have tackled the issues from the last inspection well: curriculum requirements have been met and they are continuing to develop facilities and accommodation. A well founded building and refurbishment programme has brought improvements in student dining facilities and improved access to computers, sports and physical education facilities. Students value the good quality resources; they make extensive use of them before, during and out of school time and treat them with care. The school provides good value for money.

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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	1
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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

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	1
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	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	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 Wilmslow High School, Cheshire, SK9 1LZ

On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for contributing to the inspection. We were able to visit lessons and talk with a number of you in meetings and around the school at break and lunchtimes. This is a summary of what we found and I hope that many of you will read the full report.

Wilmslow High School provides you with a good education. Standards are above average and progress and achievement are good. The sixth form is outstanding, standards are above average and students make excellent progress. The school's specialism in sports and physical education is used very well across a wide range of the school's work. It makes a very strong contribution to the extensive range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities that you enjoy. We were impressed by the knowledge you have about healthy lifestyles, the excellent work you do and the effort you are making to improve your personal fitness. The school provides good facilities and accommodation and it was good to see so many of you using them before, during and out of school time, and treating them with care. Many of you told inspectors that this was one of the best things that you enjoyed about school. Your attitude to learning and your behaviour is good. You have good relationships with teachers and treat each other with respect. Teaching and learning are good in the school and excellent in the sixth form. Most of you are making good progress towards your targets and know what to do to improve your work.

We have asked the school to do three things to improve further.

- Improve attendance and the speed with which they check up on why you are not in school. You can all help by attending regularly.
- To make sure that governors meet all of their responsibilities by putting in place an equality plan and that they regularly review it to check how it is helping you.
- To make sure methods of learning and the courses provided match the needs of the small number of students who currently do not make as much progress or achieve as well as the majority of you.