

Westcliff High School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115317
Local Authority	SOUTHEND-ON-SEA LA
Inspection number	311911
Inspection date	26 November 2007
Reporting inspector	John Godwood

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1019
6th form	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr I Croxford QC
Headteacher	Mr A J Baker
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2005
School address	Kenilworth Gardens Westcliff-on-Sea Essex SS0 0BP
Telephone number	01702 475443
Fax number	01702 470495

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of the school's aims and ethos; pupils' achievement and standards; the impact of humanities status on pupils' opportunities and development; and how well the school improves provision and performance. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons and pupils' work; discussions with the headmaster, senior staff, governors and pupils; analysis of parents' questionnaires and the school's self-evaluation documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is average in size. Pupils come from many areas within Southend and some from further afield. The school's socio-economic context is relatively favourable and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. As a selective school, pupils' attainment on entry is well above the national average, but the range of ability is wider than in some other grammar schools. A very small proportion of pupils has learning difficulties or disabilities, and none has a statement of special educational need. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is average, but very few speak English as an additional language. The school has specialist status for humanities. It has recently achieved the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. The headmaster guides the school with an exceptionally clear vision that promotes high standards and all-round development. This is put into practice extremely well through the strong support of the staff and very rigorous management practices. As a result, pupils enjoy their education thoroughly and benefit from an exceptionally wide range of opportunities. The school takes positive action to ensure that all pupils achieve as well as they can. It regularly checks how well things are going and is very effective in promoting continual improvement and development. Most parents are very pleased with the school's provision and its impact on their sons' progress, personal development and happiness. One commented typically, 'He has grown academically, spiritually and in maturity beyond all recognition.'

Achievement and standards are outstanding. Pupils make outstanding progress and achieve exceptionally high standards at all key stages. Progress seen in Year 9 test results is particularly strong, especially in English and in the proportion of pupils gaining the top levels. GCSE results show a trend of improvement and particularly good progress in the proportion of pupils gaining A* and A grades. In 2007, all pupils gained at least five A* to C grades, which was a result of effective additional support for pupils who had learning difficulties and/or disabilities or were at risk of underachieving. A-level results are well above what would be expected from students' GCSE performance. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as other pupils. Pupils' progress is at least good in almost all subjects, and outstanding in many. However, the school is aware that science and information and communication technology results are more variable. The school is taking steps to rectify both of these. The school's leadership set very challenging targets and has met almost all of these, including its targets as a humanities college.

Pupils' achievement is the result of teaching that is outstanding because of its consistently high quality. Lessons are almost always good and often outstanding. Teachers typically make full use of time and use their strong subject expertise to give clear explanations. Pupils' attention and behaviour are usually excellent, enabling them to learn at a fast rate. In the great majority of lessons, teachers make it very clear what pupils are expected to learn and use methods that make learning interesting through active engagement. Pupils gain skills in learning independently through opportunities to think for themselves and from clear feedback on what they need to improve. They enjoy these lessons greatly. As pupils report, however, in a small minority of lessons teaching does not involve them actively enough in learning independently or in assessing their own progress. These few lessons are comparatively dull and result in slower learning. The school monitors teaching rigorously and has a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. It has an effective programme of staff development, both for whole school priorities in teaching and for supporting individual teachers.

Pupils benefit from an outstanding range of opportunities to broaden their knowledge and to develop their skills and talents, both within the school day and in the very many extra-curricular activities. This is one of the school's key aims and is appreciated by pupils and their parents. The curriculum is planned carefully to meet the needs of all pupils, including many additional challenges for gifted and talented pupils, and extra tutorials for those needing support with literacy. In addition to the wide range of academic subjects, the school has introduced a few vocational courses to ensure that all pupils have courses to match their interests and aspirations. Special arrangements, including college placements, are made for a small minority. The school has used its humanities specialism very effectively to strengthen its provision. The humanities

are central to the school's educational aims, and performance in the specialist subjects is strong. Humanities teachers have used their skills to share good practice across the school. For pupils, the most noticeable impact of the humanities specialism is in the many extra-curricular activities, including trips, special events and links with the community. There is also a vast range of other activities to support their cultural development, including high quality music, drama and sport.

It is a key strength of the school that academic achievement and personal development are promoted equally, both through the school's ethos and through very systematic planning. Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Pupils gain a very secure understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They learn to appreciate others' feelings and know that bullying or racism will not be tolerated. Their behaviour is almost always exemplary. Attendance is well above average, reflecting pupils' very strong enjoyment of school life. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to their school and the wider community through their responsibilities, their involvement in activities and their very effective charity fundraising. Their academic skills and personal qualities prepare them exceptionally well for their future working lives.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Procedures for safeguarding pupils and ensuring health and safety are rigorous. The school has very good links with specialist agencies for pupils in need of additional support and with parents and the local community. Several parents commented on the school's quick response to any concerns. Recent developments in pastoral care have enabled tutors and heads of school to have a better oversight of pupils' personal and academic development. Academic guidance is very strong, through regular monitoring of progress and individual target setting. Underperforming pupils are identified promptly and given additional support. The headmaster and senior staff take a keen interest in the progress of every pupil.

The school's success is due to outstanding leadership and management. The headmaster's vision, which is shared by staff and governors, gives equal value to all pupils and to all aspects of human development. These values permeate the school's ethos and are underpinned by extremely rigorous management processes. The school has a thorough and accurate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses, both in pupils' performance and in the quality of teaching. Senior and middle managers play a full part in evaluation and planning. Improvement plans are systematic and thorough, and already include the main area for development identified by the inspection. Challenging targets are used very effectively to raise standards. As a result of high quality planning, the school is moving forward strongly. The headmaster is imaginative in using staff appointments to drive change. Because of staff restructuring, for example, pastoral staff are better able to support pupils' academic progress and there is a new drive to promote personalised and independent learning. Performance management is used very effectively to ensure that senior and middle managers know exactly what is expected of them. They are well supported but held accountable for their areas of responsibility. The quality of teaching and of pastoral care are developed and improved systematically.

Financial management is extremely effective and, as a result, the school has made many improvements to its facilities and buildings. The school building is very well maintained, with excellent displays all round the school that promote pupils' aspirations and sense of achievement. Governors provide very significant support and are scrupulous in holding the school to account. The school has improved significantly since its last inspection. This record of accomplishment, together with the rigorous self-evaluation at all levels, show that the school has outstanding capacity to improve further. It gives outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision in the sixth form is outstanding, resulting in exceptionally high standards and excellent progress. Most Year 11 pupils stay on into the sixth form and almost all sixth form students successfully pursue university education. Students are well motivated, leading to excellent attendance and a readiness to participate in lessons. Their personal development is outstanding. They play a very full part in school life, and from this gain considerably in their personal and social development. The school encourages students to run their own affairs and most grasp opportunities to lead drama productions, run clubs and teams and support younger pupils.

Sixth form teachers play a full part in the whole-school drive to improve teaching and learning, with a consequence that much classroom practice is outstanding in terms of its planning, variety and intellectual challenge. The curriculum is outstanding for the wide range of A-level courses and the extensive range of music, drama, arts and sports activities. The curriculum increasingly benefits from cooperation with the adjoining girls' school, notably in additional course options and the excellent school orchestra.

Students are very positive about the care they receive and most greatly appreciate the regular progress checks and support that enable them to make excellent progress. Higher education guidance is well informed and thorough. Sixth form leadership and management are very effective and reflect the drive for improvement and rigorous management found across the school as a whole.

What the school should do to improve further

- Bring all teaching up to the standard of the best in using methods of teaching and assessment that engage pupils actively and develop their independence.

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?	1	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	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	1	1
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	1	
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	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

27 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Westcliff High School for Boys, Westcliff-on-Sea SS0 0BP

We much enjoyed visiting your school and meeting some of you in your lessons and around the school. Thank you for your help and for sharing your views with us.

Some of you told us that you very much enjoy school life because of the many opportunities you get to extend your knowledge and broaden your experience. We were impressed by your interest in learning, your understanding of others' feelings and your generally excellent behaviour. Your personal development in moral and cultural matters is outstanding.

Standards are exceptionally high at all stages and, overall, you make outstanding progress. This is due to the hard work of you and your teachers. Teachers generally give clear explanations. Much of the teaching is outstanding. As some of you told us, in most lessons teachers use interesting methods and clear feedback that help you to learn actively and develop your independence. In a few lessons, however, teaching and learning are less effective because you are too passive and your independence is not well developed. We were pleased to see that school is already working hard to bring the standard of all teaching up to that of the best.

Several of you mentioned that you believe the school is well run. We agree and judge it to be an outstanding school. This is because of the excellent range of opportunities that you are given and the extreme thoroughness with which the quality of all aspects of school life is continually checked and improved. The headmaster and staff work very hard to keep improving the school. Humanities college status and the planned new buildings are just two examples.

The school has improved strongly and we are very confident that it will continue to improve. You can play your part in this by working closely with your teachers to meet your targets and taking full advantage of the opportunities you are offered.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Godwood

Lead inspector