

The Wensleydale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121679
Local Authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	314080
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2008
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	550
6th form	76
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mavis Parry
Headteacher	Mr Tony Rawdin
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2005
School address	Richmond Road Leyburn North Yorkshire DL8 5HY
Telephone number	01969 622244
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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 two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than the average secondary school. Students travel from a wide and mostly rural area of the dales, and approximately 20% are from service families stationed at nearby military bases. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. Students are mostly White British and less than 1% are from Black and minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school was awarded science college status and gained a healthy schools award in 2006. The school is an extended school and provides adult and community learning. At the instigation of the local authority, an executive headteacher has recently been appointed: at the time of inspection he had been in post for seven days.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with Section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The overall achievement of students is unsatisfactory and a significant proportion, mostly boys, do not make sufficient progress in relation to their prior attainment by the end of Key Stage 4. Systems for tracking students' progress, identifying those who are beginning to fall behind, and taking action to support improvement, work better in some areas than others. Processes for setting targets are insufficiently robust because they are not informed by a secure analysis of data about students' performance and progress. The result has been to maintain standards at a satisfactory level rather than helping to stretch performance or to close gaps between the attainment and progress of boys and girls at Key Stage 4.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. Attendance is above average and students are happy to come to school to meet friends and enjoy the broad range of clubs and activities that enrich the curriculum. Work to promote healthy lifestyles is good and most students participate readily in the many sporting activities offered. Activities provided as a result of the school's specialist science funding are well attended but the school has yet to evaluate the difference they make to students' personal development and learning.

Behaviour in the school is inadequate and exclusions are high. Well-founded measures have been taken to institute a behaviour policy and a code of conduct. Most students respect this and act calmly in lessons and around the school. Students acknowledge an improvement in the school in the last eight months but they and their parents remain concerned about the low level disruption which hampers learning in a significant proportion of lessons.

Staff absences mean that students have had a series of teachers which has disrupted their learning. The school has made use of training and support to improve the quality of teaching and learning and there are some notable examples of good teaching. However, there are not enough high quality lessons with challenging tasks accurately pitched to students' abilities.

Care and pastoral support are good but the quality of academic guidance is variable. The setting of homework and marking of work are infrequent and many students are unaware of their targets or what to do to improve. Many parents are justifiably concerned about this and a lack of information about the progress their child is making.

The school's self-evaluation is honest in identifying shortcomings in achievement and standards and in measures taken to improve the school since the last inspection. It judges that the effectiveness of the school is inadequate and inspectors agree. Self-evaluation is weak because procedures to quality assure teaching and learning and assess the progress of learners are inconsistent across the school. Leaders at all levels have been slow to tackle emerging issues and the governing body has not met its duty to hold the school to account. Consequently leadership and management overall are inadequate. There are a number of contributory factors. Absences in the senior leadership team, in the leadership of core subjects and in staffing generally, combined with increased demands to implement specialist school plans and supervise a new building programme have overburdened school leaders. With the help of the local authority the school is developing a clear direction and more stable staffing is emerging. Governors' positive morale and desire to improve is shared by staff and students alike.

Parents expressed many concerns to inspectors but remain generally supportive of the school and want to work in partnership with it to help their children achieve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Standards in the sixth form are broadly in line with the national averages. Students' achievement overall is satisfactory given that many enter with lower than average GCSE results. Challenging targets and systems to track students' progress are in place. Students' performance is closely monitored and most make adequate progress. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and is enhanced by good relationships between staff and students. Students value the small class sizes and high levels of individual attention they receive. Most students are engaged in their learning and are generally pleased with the education they receive: they feel well cared for by staff. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new director of sixth form has a clear strategic vision and plans to tailor the curriculum better to meet students' needs for more practical and vocational courses are well advanced. At present the take-up of science subjects, the school's specialism, is low. New provision to improve sixth form study facilities is nearing completion. The number of students who successfully complete their courses and move on to employment and higher education is high, reflecting the good guidance they receive.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure middle leaders adopt consistent approaches to quality assuring teaching and learning.
- Establish robust, consistent systems to track the progress of all students and implement measures to tackle underperformance quickly to close the gaps between boys' and girls' performance.
- Improve teaching and learning by tailoring work to match students' needs and establishing consistent approaches to ensuring all students know how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve.
- Implement consistent approaches to improve students' behaviour, ensuring students know the standards expected of them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' performance on entry to the school is broadly in line with the average nationally. Students reach standards which are above average at the end of Year 9 and in line with national averages at the end of Year 11 and post-16.

Students' standards and achievement at Key Stage 3 in 2006 dipped to broadly in line with the national average. Student's achievement in mathematics was above average and they made better progress than in science and English. In contrast to later key stages there is little difference between the performance of boys and girls. Results from national tests taken in 2007 show an improved picture with above average standards overall. Students' achievement was satisfactory overall, improving considerably to good in English. The school met one of its four specialist status targets in 2007; 66% of students reached the higher Level 6 and above in mathematics. However, it failed to reach the governors' targets.

At Key Stage 4 standards overall are average but a wide gap exists between the performance of boys and girls: this has persisted since the last inspection. Results show that boys underachieve significantly and do not make the expected improvements in their secondary education at Key Stage 4. Attainment in GCSE examinations in 2007 is below average. Less than a third of boys who gained five or more A* to C grades also achieved this standard in English and mathematics. However, all students left school with at least one GCSE, a better picture than nationally. The school failed to reach either governors' agreed targets in the last two years or its specialist targets in 2007.

The school acknowledges that there is a need to focus on the achievement of all students. Data analysis is under-developed and the school is not able to show the progress that students in Years 7, 8, and 10 are making. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported in lessons and make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, along with their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory overall. Student leaders in Years 9 and 11 mentor their peers and provide a listening ear for concerns; they are positive role models in promoting social development. International and national links with charities and other schools enhance students' cultural development.

Behaviour within the school is variable and inadequate overall: exclusion rates have risen in efforts to maintain discipline. The majority of students behave sensibly and are able to relate well to each other. However, a significant minority lack self-control and do not have positive attitudes to learning. The behaviour of these students hampers their own and other students' learning. Attendance is good. Students say they enjoy school and socialising with friends and have positive attitudes to learning. However, students feel the opposite about lessons which are not well planned to match their needs or where the behaviour of some students wastes times and hinders everyone's learning.

Students' increased involvement in the school council allows them to express their views and to influence aspects of school life. This has resulted in the provision of lockers and healthy food options in the canteen. Students know the importance of being healthy and many sporting activities are well attended during lunchtime and after school. Many students participate in clubs and activities through the extended schools programme. Through their involvement in work experience, enterprise activities and access to careers advice and guidance, students are satisfactorily developing useful skills to contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching is inadequate and too many students underachieve in the courses they take. Recent reviews of the school's work indicate that there are pockets of inadequate teaching and inspectors confirm this view. There is some good and very good teaching, to which students

respond well. Learning is at its best when work is planned to include a variety of activities which allowed students to learn in different ways. For example, in a Spanish lesson observed during the inspection students listened to a teacher's introduction, participated in paired work within an appropriate game, engaged in written work and concluded with spoken contributions. Pupils worked in silence, at a good pace, showed interest and made good progress. However, in some other lessons this is not the case, particularly in Years 9 to 11. At times pupils are much too noisy and this slows the pace of their work and hinders the quality of the teacher's presentation. Some teachers do not manage behaviour effectively or structure lessons to encourage the full engagement of students.

The setting of homework is extremely variable in both its frequency and challenge. Marking of work is similarly variable, frequently lacking guidance for students to improve their learning or targets for students' future work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

All requirements of the National Curriculum are met and the school is strengthening provision in vocational courses, particularly those which meet local economic needs in this rural community. Further courses are being introduced to provide better progression routes for 14 to 19 year olds. Students express a reasonable degree of interest in the work they study. In class most students show interest in the work they tackle but there are cases, particularly in Key Stage 4, when students quickly lose interest and misbehave.

Students welcome the guidance they receive in the personal and social education programme. They readily participate in the broad range of clubs and out of school activities provided, with sporting provision being a particular strength. The curriculum is weakened by too little provision for study skills, insufficient access to information and communication technology resources, and unproductive use of time in form tutor periods.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Care, guidance and support for students are satisfactory overall, with good levels of care and support. Staff place great emphasis on nurturing and sustaining good relationships; this is acknowledged and appreciated by the majority of students. However, some students do not respond positively and the exclusion rate has risen over the last two years. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are appropriate and child protection procedures are in place. Good transition arrangements exist for students moving from primary school and this is especially so for those who are vulnerable. Although the school has made a start in developing systems to track students' progress, at present this is underdeveloped and inconsistent across year groups. Academic guidance is inconsistent and, despite positive examples, many students are unaware of their targets or what to do to improve their work. Sustained working partnerships with post-16 providers and supportive careers advice ensure that students know about potential progression routes and are able to make informed choices when they leave the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

The senior leadership team has changed significantly in the last year, including a very recent change in the headship. These recent appointments have brought an energetic style to the team as well as a shared view about the strengths and weaknesses of the school and what needs to be done to move forward. The headteacher and senior leaders, with the support of governors and the local authority, are beginning to develop formal plans to tackle the improvements required.

In the last eight months the school has focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning, and behaviour and more recently, developing middle leaders' practice in evaluation. Despite some positive steps forward, absences and changes to staffing have frustrated attempts to establish consistent approaches throughout the school. Plans, such as those to restructure staffing and provision to better meet students' needs, have yet to be implemented.

Governors are highly supportive of the school and are developing greater awareness of how to undertake their role in holding the school to account. However the governing body has not been rigorous enough in ensuring school plans are implemented, identifying why the targets they set have not been met, and in checking that issues from the last inspection have been acted upon.

The school judges its leadership and management to be satisfactory but inspectors judge it to be inadequate. Gaps remain in key monitoring and evaluation systems. Much of the analysis of progress has relied upon middle leaders identifying underperforming individuals and developing interventions to support improvement. The impact of this work on students' performance is not consistent across the school. Arrangements to identify students at risk of underperforming across a range of subjects are at a very early stage of development and it is too early to see the full impact of this.

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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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	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?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	4	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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?	4	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?	3	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?	4	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of The Wensleydale School, Leyburn, DL8 5HY

Thank you for contributing to our recent inspection of the school. You informed us about what you like about your school and where you would like it to improve and that was very helpful. I am writing to let you know the results.

You attend school regularly and enjoy meeting friends. You were very positive about the range of activities available, particularly sports, and take good care of your health and fitness. You were complimentary about some of your teachers and appreciated the way some make learning interesting. Many of you are unhappy about having frequent changes of teacher and welcome the things the new senior staff say they will do to improve the school. Although there have been some recent improvements in teaching and in behaviour around the school, many of you, particularly boys are capable of achieving much more. Because these things need to improve further your school requires 'Special Measures'. This means it will have more support and inspectors will check regularly that things are improving.

We have asked the school to focus on the following areas:

- Ensuring there is a consistent approach to making sure teaching and learning are improving
- The quality of lessons should improve so that all of you are challenged to do your best, know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve. You can help by letting your teacher know if you are finding work too easy or too hard.
- The school must track the progress you make and act quickly to support those of you who fall behind so that the gap between boys' and girls' performance closes.
- Make sure everyone works together to improve behaviour, knows what good behaviour looks like and understands what is unacceptable. You can help by giving your full attention in lessons.

Thank you for the part you played in this inspection and good luck with your studies.