

Wallingford School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123261
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314557
Inspection date	21 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Peter Sanderson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1068
6th form	164
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr David Ebbs
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Willis
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
School address	St George's Road Wallingford OX10 8HH
Telephone number	01491 837115
Fax number	01491 825278

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, particularly in Key Stage 4; care, guidance and support and the impact of this on students' achievement and personal development and well-being; the effectiveness of leadership and management in ensuring consistency of good practice in teaching and learning and assessment across the school. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, published test and examination results, policies, minutes and other school documentation, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and students, and parental questionnaires. 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 form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Wallingford School is an average sized secondary school serving a relatively advantaged area. Around half of the students stay on into the sixth form. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Most students are of White British heritage and the number of students whose first language is not English is below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that found in most schools. The school has been a specialist sports college since September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wallingford school is a good school, which has developed apace in recent years. Both students and parents are supportive of the school and recognise the improvements that have been made. This is shown by a number of comments received from parents, such as, 'The school has gone from strength to strength ... A very good school that is getting better ... The school has improved a lot since the arrival of the new headteacher.'

The headteacher and senior staff lead the school extremely well. They have maintained a clear focus on improving standards of attainment and students' personal development. This is a vision that has been effectively shared with all staff. Staff have high expectations of students and this is reflected in the challenging targets that are set for them. Senior leaders know their school very well. This is due to an excellent system of monitoring and self-evaluation involving both the academic and pastoral work of the school. Areas in need of improvement have been accurately identified and are effectively addressed in the school development plan. The headteacher has been particularly effective and successful in managing an inherited deficit budget. He has reduced the deficit, whilst ensuring that the opportunities for students have been protected and standards have continued to rise. The governors are very supportive of the school but recognise that in the past they have not been sufficiently rigorous in their monitoring of the school's work, particularly the budget. Good structures and procedures are now in place to enable governors to effectively monitor and challenge the work of the school. The school has excellent capacity to improve further.

Students enter Year 7 with standards similar to the national average. They make very good progress in English, mathematics and science during their first three years at the school attaining standards above the national average by the end of Year 9. Standards at the end of Year 11 improved significantly in 2006 to above the national average. Standards fell very slightly in 2007 and there was variation in students' achievement between subjects. For example, students achieved very well in physical education and design and technology but only satisfactorily in religious education and geography. The percentage of students achieving 5+ A*- C grades including English and mathematics remained significantly above average. The school's robust assessment and tracking data indicates that standards at the end of Year 11 are due to rise again this year. The progress made by students from Years 7 to 11 is good. The school has very good systems to track the progress of all students towards their targets. Those students who are identified as underachieving are provided with effective support. This recently improved system is having a positive impact on students' achievement and helps ensure that all groups of students make similar, good progress throughout the school.

The good progress made by students is a result of the good teaching they receive. Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are planned well around clear learning outcomes. Most lessons contain interesting activities that engage and motivate students and are pitched at the right level so that all are sufficiently challenged. However, in some lessons activities are rather mundane and do not provide sufficient challenge for all students. Many teachers mark work well and give clear guidance to students about how to improve their work. However, this good practice is not yet consistent across the school. As a result, students are not always clear about what they need to do to move from one grade or level to another. The senior team are taking action to improve the consistency of good teaching and learning and assessment practice. This has focussed on support and training for subject leaders so that they are better able to monitor and develop best practice in their subject areas. While this has had a positive impact,

resulting in improvement in some subject areas, there remains variation in the application of best practice.

The personal development of students is good. Students, staff and parents all agree that standards of behaviour have improved in recent years. Due to clear expectations and consistently applied procedures, the majority of students behave very well both in lessons and around the school. In a few lessons, there is some low level disruption by a small minority of students. This is particularly the case when lessons fail to capture their interest and attention. Students' social, moral and cultural development are good. Students have a strong sense of social responsibility. For example, there are close links with a school in South Africa, and students are involved in a range of charity work. However, spiritual development is only satisfactory. The care provided for all students including those who are vulnerable is a strength of the school. Staff know students well and they work effectively with a range of outside agencies to provide students with good support. Students enjoy school, say that they feel safe and that bullying is rare. On the few occasions when bullying does occur students report that staff deal with it quickly and effectively. Child protection and safeguarding arrangements are robust and rigorous. A number of actions have been taken to improve attendance during the past year. However, attendance remains at average levels and is a continuing area of focus for the school. Students make a particularly positive contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. Members of Years 10 and 12 have been trained by the school councillor to act as 'student supporters' to younger students and the school council is very effective in contributing to school policy. Students develop skills in literacy, numeracy and information, communication technology that prepare them well for the world of work.

The curriculum provides well for students needs and aspirations. A good range of courses is available for students to choose from in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. In order to extend this provision the school recognises that it needs to develop further partnership arrangements with other schools or colleges. Specialist status makes a strong impact on students' achievement and enjoyment. Sports activity is well embedded in the curriculum and is central to much of the school's work with the local community. It makes a very good contribution to students' wider personal development as well as to specific areas such as understanding how to lead a healthy and active life. The establishment of the Junior Sports Leadership Award also plays an important role in developing students' leadership skills.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The attainment of students on entry to the sixth form is slightly above that found in most schools. Standards at the end of Years 12 and 13 in both academic and vocational courses are above average. The overall progress of students is good although there is some variation in the achievement of students on different courses.

The personal development of students is good. They make a strong contribution to the school community, acting as role models and mentors for younger students. They are good ambassadors for the school and enthusiastic in leading activities, for example, through the sports leadership course. Staff know students well and provide them with good care, support and guidance.

The quality of teaching is good. The majority of lessons are well prepared to meet students' needs. The leadership team have recently introduced a more rigorous system to track students' progress. This enables those students who are making less than expected progress to be

identified early and provided with appropriate support. The full impact of this new system on raising standards has yet to be seen.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Monitoring and evaluation gives the head of sixth form a clear picture of priorities for development. The sixth form is growing in size and the school has rightly recognised the need to increase the size of the sixth form leadership team in order to further develop its capacity to drive forward improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the percentage of good and outstanding lessons.
- Ensure consistency of good assessment practice across all subjects so that students are clear about what they need to do to improve their work.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ 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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	1	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	2
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	1	2
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

05 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Wallingford School, Wallingford, OX10 8HH

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school recently. We met and talked with many of you, sat in some of your lessons and looked at work that you had done. Now that we have finished the inspection we wanted to let you know our findings.

We judged that your school provides you with a good education. We agreed with you and your parents that your headteacher leads the school extremely well. He has led the improvement of many aspects of the school and has very good plans to make it even better. The following points are the key strengths of the school.

- You are taught well and consequently you are making good progress.
- The majority of you behave very well in lessons and around the school.
- Staff take good care of you. Your tutors know you well and you told us you feel safe and secure while in school.
- Staff track your progress well. Those of you who need some extra help to do well are identified early and given good support.
- You make a very positive contribution to the life of the school and the wider community.
- You have a good range of courses to choose from in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- Specialist status in sport is benefiting you all. It has a strong impact on your achievement and enjoyment of school.

Although your school is good, there are a couple of things that could make it even better. Many of your lessons contain interesting activities that both engage and challenge you. We have asked the leadership team to ensure that more of your lessons are like this. We have also asked them to ensure that you are given clear advice in all of your subjects about what you need to do to improve your work. You can help with this by continuing to participate actively in lessons and by responding positively to the advice you are given about how to improve your work.

Thank you again and I wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Sanderson

Her Majesty's Inspector