

Wishmore Cross School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125462
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	319535
Inspection date	1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Sheila Nolan

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Bernard Bartlett
Headteacher	Ms Beverly Minette
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2007
School address	Alpha Road Chobham Woking GU24 8NE
Telephone number	01276 857 555
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

This was a single integrated inspection of education and social care (welfare). The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector for one day and by a Social Care Inspector for two days.

Description of the school

Wishmore Cross School provides education for both day and residential students with a wide range of emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. All have a statement of special educational need and most are eligible for a free school meal. Students are drawn mainly from the local area although a few are accepted from adjacent local authorities (LA). The school offers boarding for up to approximately half of the students for a maximum of four nights per week. Currently, ten students are boarding. The school has developed new, separate boarding facilities; within the building, there are three separate boarding units, a residential staff office and a medical area. The school has recently been awarded Sportsmark.

The overwhelming majority of students are of White British heritage. Many are known to social services and most have experienced significant disruption to their education. The headteacher is responsible for both Care and Education in the school.

At the last inspection, the school was given a notice to improve because of significant concerns about unacceptable behaviour, bullying, poor levels of attendance, and inconsistencies in how staff managed students. There were also concerns about the variations in the quality of teaching. A new substantive headteacher has been in post for two terms.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Wishmore Cross is a satisfactory and improving school. Thus, in accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act (2005), HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. The school has made steady progress since it was last inspected, not least because of a renewed emphasis on working closely with parents, on individualised pathways for students, and because staff now have a common expectation of what is acceptable behaviour.

A recently agreed motto for the school reads 'Wish 4 More'. Wishmore is striving to fulfil this under the present headteacher by evaluating its practice very robustly. There is an impressive sense of teamwork among staff. They are keen to do the best for their students, to encourage them to live up to the school's vision and to recognise how much more they can achieve with hard work and real effort. Well-considered changes to the curriculum have improved students' perceptions of the school and raised attendance, although it is still too low. The number of exclusions has reduced significantly. Year 11, for example, now really want to be present to enjoy the vocational courses that provide them with a solid basis for their future economic well-being. Students assured inspectors convincingly that they feel safe in school and considered that behaviour is much better than previously. The curriculum provides satisfactory support for students to lead healthy lives. Most are active participants in sport, approve of the healthy menus in the canteen and take care of the colourful new dand;eacute;cor across the school. They are learning to contribute to the school community by looking after younger students, by ensuring others respect their environment and by participating in assemblies using some of their 'media skills'. A number contributed generously to gifts for an Ethiopian village, bringing treasured artefacts to the collection.

Although standards are below average in relation to national figures, students are making satisfactory progress from their starting points. Year 10, in particular, show signs of achieving well along with Year 9 who are preparing seriously for the imminent national tests. All of the current Year 11 are expected to achieve some form of accreditation that is likely to pave the way to work or further training.

Improvements in the students' academic progress and in their personal development owe much to the intensive programme to develop the quality of teaching and learning. The majority of lessons are at least satisfactory, although leaders at all levels acknowledge that feedback to students on helping them to improve their work is still too variable across subjects. Boarding provision plays an effective part in promoting students' welfare and enjoyment of school although there are missed opportunities for staff in both boarding and the school to liaise on and track students' day-to-day learning and personal development.

Staff at all levels now give total commitment to providing a fully inclusive ethos for the overwhelming majority of the students who receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. 'The school helps us and helps us learn' wrote a Year 7 student. Links with external agencies are strong so that students and their families receive helpful support when needed. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. Governors, staff, students and parents recognise the great strides the school has made in the last year under the good leadership of the headteacher. Training activities are well directed to encourage the development of all senior and middle managers.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 3

The quality of boarding provision is satisfactory. It meets most of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools, though some shortfalls are evident and provision is not used to capacity as there are many surplus places. The headteacher provides strong and consistent leadership to the staff. Three of the four recommendations from the last social care inspection are met and the fourth is in progress.

The school ensures that health and medical matters are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. The medical practice policy and procedures now provide additional guidance for staff. Students retain the services of their doctor, though a local general practitioner is available to the school. Records and controls for the administration of medication are kept appropriately. All care staff have received training in first aid and in the administration of medication. Care staff provide sound advice and guidance in supporting students in leading healthy lives through individual and group discussion.

The school's menu provides a healthy balanced diet and the meals are of good quality, with ample portions. Students' behaviour and table manners at meal times are noticeably better than at the time of the previous inspection. The students now enjoy meal times as a social occasion.

There are detailed procedures regarding privacy and confidentiality. A telephone is available for student's use. Toilet and bathing facilities afford privacy and students have lockable facilities in which to keep possessions. Confidential records are securely held. Students are confident that staff keep information about them in a confidential manner.

The school's complaint procedure is available and includes a simplified, easy-to-read complaints leaflet for students and a staff 'whistle-blowing' speaking out policy. Students confirm that they know how to make a complaint and they are confident that complaints are taken seriously by the school. Students raised no complaints about the school in discussions. Complaint records are appropriately kept and are checked by the school and the Standard 33 visitor on half-termly monitoring visits.

There are clear procedures regarding anti-bullying, including the recently introduced 'yellow and red card' system. The school's record of racist incidents shows a reduction in numbers. Most students say that bullying incidents are far fewer and that staff deal effectively with them. However, a minority of student questionnaires stated that staff could do more to reduce bullying incidents and this remains a priority for the school's new management. The revised behaviour management policy has improved students' attitudes and behaviour, including reducing the use of bad language. Students show staff and each other more respect and relationships are more harmonious. Procedures for dealing with unauthorised absence are appropriate; however 'bound breaking' in boarding time has occasionally occurred.

Sanctions are clearly detailed and recorded. Restraint records are usually kept appropriately although one restraint incident was not recorded within the required timescale. All staff receive training on restraint via the 'positive options' programme.

The school takes appropriate steps regarding the safeguarding and protection of students. The school has comprehensive child protection procedures of which care staff are aware and have received training. The school liaises well with a range of agencies and individuals regarding child protection and has also set up a parents' support group regarding student safeguarding.

The majority of students said that they now feel safer in the school than in the past and that the care staff have full regard for their safety, protection and wellbeing. The health and safety policy is implemented and monitored effectively and involves a wide range of risk assessments, including for individual students. Recruitment and vetting procedures are sound and extend to other adults who work with or reside at the school, such as taxi drivers. Students are involved in the school's recruitment process.

The boarding section has developed further means by which it supports students' education and learning but not all activity in this area is formally recorded. Care staff contribute increasingly to students' progress and well-being, liaising with other professionals and parents. Students say that they appreciate the involvement of the care staff in their lessons and in boarding time. They also appreciate the work of their link workers who play a key role in promoting their welfare and progress.

Care staff contribute to students assessments for their special educational needs and Individual Education Plans, and attend annual review meetings. They attend school assemblies, provide support to students in classroom lessons and help to facilitate and supervise students' homework and PHSE subjects in the evenings. The boarding section contributes to the wider curriculum by encouraging purposeful activities in the evenings. Older students follow independence training programmes where they learn basic life skills and some are encouraged and supported to do work experience.

Students can choose to join a range of fora where they may consult with staff and convey their views. Boarding student questionnaires and discussions reveal that the majority of students are satisfied with the school's arrangements for consultation. Students attend their reviews, as appropriate, where they can further voice their opinions. Care staff visit students' homes in order to maintain contact with parents and secure their views regarding their child's placement.

Each boarding student has a signed contract that clearly sets out behavioural expectations, and a well-prepared placement plan covering areas such as health and medical needs, physical and emotional development, cultural and racial needs, leisure, contact, action plans and targets. A range of other professionals, such as the National Youth and Advisory Service and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, contribute to these.

Only two of the school's three boarding houses are currently occupied. The boarding houses 'Dragon' and 'Unicorn' provide adequate communal and private space for the students. They are decorated and furnished to a very good standard and are well maintained with no signs of vandalism or graffiti. Students' bedrooms are homely and comfortable and are personalised to varying degrees. Students say that they are satisfied with their standard of accommodation and that they enjoy the atmosphere in the houses. Standards of cleanliness and hygiene are high throughout the boarding areas and no safety hazards are evident.

The school has 11 care staff, including the head of care and three waking night staff. The staff team has a good gender balance and staff have substantial experience of working with students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The boarding section has a high staff/student ratio due to the low boarding numbers.

Staff are appropriately deployed and are attentive to individual students' needs. They are committed to the students and work with them in a confident, enthusiastic and sensitive manner, providing a clear, consistent framework but applying boundaries when necessary. There are regular care staff meetings, with good levels of communication amongst the care staff team and with the teaching staff.

Induction procedures for new staff are comprehensive. Staff have individual development plans which detail their training and supervisory needs and are trained appropriately. The school's staffing arrangements help to ensure that students receive a satisfactory standard of care, and have led to improvements in a number of areas since the previous inspection. The mechanisms for assuring the quality of boarding provision are sound and the new management team have built on established routines and procedures.

Recommendations for boarding provision

To improve the quality and standards of care further the school should take account of the following recommendations

- Ensure that care staff are aware of students' whereabouts at all times and that boundaries are clear regarding visiting certain venues (NMS 8.1)
- Record any incidents of restraint within 24 hours of the event (NMS 10.14)
- Track the contribution of care staff to students education more formally (NMS 12.6).

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise attendance further.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good and ensure that the best practice in helping students improve their work is spread across all subjects.
- Ensure that school and boarding staff communicate effectively regarding students' learning and personal development.

A small proportion of 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' achievement is satisfactory although overall standards remain below average.

Records show that the majority of students are underachieving when they join Wishmore Cross because of previous disruption to their education. Students' starting points are much lower than those that are typical for their ages because of challenging behaviour and other social and emotional difficulties that have interrupted their learning. Because most students make steady progress towards their personal behavioural and social targets, their progress in basic skills accelerates, particularly in Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 9, standards in both the most recent national tests and in the current students' work are close to average with most students steadily making up lost ground, particularly in English and mathematics. Students benefit greatly from the high level of individual attention afforded them in their personalised programmes.

In past years, progress in Years 10 and 11 has been too slow. In the 2007 Year 11 examinations, too few students made enough progress and none gained a higher grade in GCSE examinations. Nevertheless, the progress of the present Years 10 and 11 is more positive and is satisfactory. Year 11 are engaged in a wide range of vocational courses leading to key skills and other non-formal accreditation. Gifted and talented Year 10 students are already achieving successfully in sports, music, science and a range of other academic courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Most students have made steady strides in their personal development over the course of the year, a marked improvement since the last inspection. As a result, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is now satisfactory. This is reflected in their new-found respect for the much improved, cheerful school environment and in their growing understanding that 'actions have consequences'. Students generally behave satisfactorily in lessons and many show positive attitudes to learning. The majority are convinced that the adults around them are there to help and this allows them to feel secure and safe around the site. Year 7 students are especially pleased with their Year 10 'buddies' who are active participants in the school's anti-bullying drive. Although attendance figures are still too low, more students are regularly present in school because they enjoy the improved range of vocational and other activities open to them. This is especially so for Year 11 whose attendance is not far short of average over the last two terms. Students report their delight in receiving the 'golden moment' awards for good achievements and enjoy the instant electronic display of successful work.

All students participate enthusiastically in a wide range of sporting activities. They are well briefed on what constitutes healthy living although not always ready or able to take the necessary steps towards sensible eating and health-promoting life styles. Within the residential provision, however, students are enthusiastic about preparing nutritious meals, including breakfast, which is open to, and much appreciated by, day students.

Students make valuable contributions to the school community through the school council, support for new arrivals and younger students, and team work on the local environment. They support the wider community through 'clear-ups' on the common and by raising funds for charities at home and overseas. Good participation in work experience, the school credit system, gains in basic skills, and experience of financial and budgeting opportunities enable students to make satisfactory progress towards their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Very regular monitoring of both lesson planning and classroom practice ensures that the school has an accurate evaluation of teaching and learning.

Warm working relationships and purposeful individualised support allow students to make steady progress and grow confident in their academic tasks. The management of students' behaviour by both teachers and learning support assistants is good and much improved since the last inspection. A small Year 7 group, for example, were well engaged in tasks on probability despite the absence of their regular teacher. Interesting tasks for Years 10 and 11, including estimating and buying their supplies for bricklaying and other practical work capture students' interest. One Year 10 student was genuinely excited by the prospect of a day in college studying animal welfare. Nevertheless, in some classes, staff use too few visual resources to encourage students to think creatively. Feedback to students on how to improve their work is still too variable across subjects

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school is making sound progress in developing the curriculum to better match the needs of individual students, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Its real strength lies in the personalised pathways now available to students. There is a stronger emphasis on vocational opportunities, including those for information and communication technology (ICT) than at the time of the last inspection. Personal, health and social education is a unifying thread linking many of the students' experiences. Out-of- hours activities, particularly for boarders, day visits to central London, excursions to local attractions and extended residential trips usefully raise the students' awareness of what they can achieve.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Arrangements for safeguarding students are secure. Students report that they feel safe in school and in the residential accommodation. A high level of individual attention from staff supports students throughout the day and in the boarding facilities. Students have identified adults in whom they can confide. Students consider the one-to-one support from adults as one of the best aspects of Wishmore Cross. Greater consistency in the school staff's approaches to managing challenging behaviour underpin the good personal guidance for students. Individual learning and behaviour plans are a key mechanism to track and support students' progress. The school rightly judges, however, that not all guidance to students on how to improve work, particularly written work, is as helpful as it should be.

The school has increasingly strong links with numerous external agencies and strives to find the best support for the students, and where possible, their families. Mental health needs are managed carefully, for example, and external counsellors support those at risk beyond the school day.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and some aspects are good, such as the leadership of the present headteacher. She has driven forward improvements, particularly in the provision for the students' personal development, in the curriculum and in the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. All teachers and support staff have been challenged to give priority to students' learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Professional development activities are closely linked to an honest and detailed self-evaluation process. The impact is clear in the students' now satisfactory engagement in lessons and in their improved attendance and behaviour. Senior managers now understand their accountabilities and are well focused on developing the roles of middle managers to ensure students experience a curriculum that matches their needs and interests. The steady pace of improvement since the last inspection demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve further and to promote successfully a fully inclusive ethos.

Besides recognising the significant improvements of the past year, the school leadership has a realistic view of where further improvements are needed. There is a clear recognition that not all initiatives have yet been fully effective. Nevertheless, parents and students now have

greater confidence in the school and in the likelihood of rising standards. One parent wrote of her gratitude for the 'support, time and effort' in improving her son's behaviour and for teachers that 'listen'. The governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and rightly acknowledge the agreed priorities for the coming year. These include further embedding the new behaviour management procedures and improving attendance even more. Governors also support the school's plans to develop baseline assessments when students join the school and that the quality of checks on classroom and out- of- hours learning, including that in the boarding provision should be better.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	4
The behaviour of learners	3
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	3
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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
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
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

16 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Wishmore Cross School, Woking, GU24 8NE

After our visit to Wishmore Cross, we would like to share our findings with you. You made us very welcome and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to talk to us about their thoughts on the school and their work.

You think Wishmore is improving and we agree with you that it now offers you a satisfactory education. We are pleased that those of you present in school during the inspection behaved in a calm and sensible manner showing consideration and respect for each other and your teachers. Too many of your fellow students, however, still take too much time off school and miss valuable learning opportunities.

The commitment shown by your teachers and support staff to keep you safe in school is impressive. We know you appreciate this greatly. Many of you use the opportunities Wishmore affords you to make a difference to others through your support and care for younger students and through projects in the community.

You have a good headteacher who is well supported by other senior staff and governors. They are working tirelessly on your behalf to make sure you get the best possible education the school can provide, especially through the new personalised plans that you enjoy.

To make Wishmore even better, we have asked your teachers to ensure that you learn well in all lessons and to make sure you know how to improve your written work. We would also like your after-school learning, particularly in boarding, to be recorded and shared with the school staff.

We hope you will continue to work with your teachers to make your school the best it can be. We are sure you will encourage some poor attenders to be present more regularly and we hope you will all live up to the school's new motto: 'Wish 4 More'.

We wish all of you at Wishmore Cross a very successful future.

Sheila Nolan

Lead Inspector