

John Willmott School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103522
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323849
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Clive Kempton 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 (total)	1134
Sixth form	222
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Murray
Headteacher	Kenneth Nimmo
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Reddicap Heath Road Sutton Coldfield B75 7DY
Telephone number	01213 781946
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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

John Willmott is a very popular, oversubscribed school and has been a specialist technology college since September 2001. The vast majority of students are White British and come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals or who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The school has achieved the following awards: Sportsmark; Lead Department in Business Studies; and the NQT Guarantee award for quality induction.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

John Willmott is a satisfactory and improving school with a good, popular and growing sixth form. One parent described it as 'a school that supports the whole child as an individual and strives to help students succeed'. The care, guidance and support provided for students are good and a strength of the school. Another strength is the students' personal development and well-being. They develop into confident, articulate young adults.

The school has improved since the last inspection but has only managed to keep pace with national attainment trends. The percentage of students who gain five or more A* to G grades in Year 11 is, however, above the national average. Students enter the school with standards that are broadly average, make satisfactory progress and attain average standards by the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The sixth form admits students from other local schools so has a wider ability range. Relative to students' broader attainment, they make better progress in the sixth form. This is why achievement is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Early signs suggest that standards are beginning to improve at a quicker rate throughout the school. Above average standards are attained in some individual subjects, including the school's specialist technology college subjects. The specialist subjects are beginning to have an impact on whole-school attainment, especially in the good use of information and communication technology. The school has started to expand its currently satisfactory curriculum with additional vocational courses to take more account of the wide range of students' need. This broader curriculum also has the potential to raise standards, as it has done in the sixth form, where the wide range of courses available, some at neighbouring schools, provides a good sixth form curriculum.

The school has worked hard to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and inspectors agree with the school's own evaluation that teaching is good. However, while lessons observed demonstrate secure teaching skills, this has not yet had an impact on students' learning and improved standards, which is why teaching and learning are currently judged to be satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. There is insufficient challenge in the learning activities in some lessons. Students are capable of attaining higher standards, especially with the more rigorous use of the increased data that are now available throughout the school.

Students develop a good range of personal and social skills. They learn to empathise with those less fortunate than themselves through considerable fund-raising for charity. Sixth form students especially have frequent opportunities to give something back to the school community through their voluntary work and supporting younger students in the school. They are active in making decisions too, such as the refurbishment of the toilets and organising inter-house events.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Middle managers are responding well to the challenges of senior leaders. Their detailed self-evaluation and development planning are beginning to improve standards. However, whole-school development planning and the process of target setting are not sharp enough, have too many priorities and do not focus sufficiently on the few key areas required to improve standards quickly. Action planning has insufficient measurable milestones for senior managers and governors to check the success of their actions. This notwithstanding, the headteacher and leadership team have worked tirelessly over the last few years to create a climate and culture of whole-school improvement. The leadership is now poised to improve standards quickly and has good capacity to act on the issues raised by this inspection.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

In 2008, students made good progress in both Years 12 and 13. The quality of teaching and learning is good, providing lessons that are engaging, well planned and well resourced. The school offers a wide range of courses, supported by the Sutton Consortium of schools, enabling students to take additional subjects. Students' personal development is good and they enjoy their experiences in the sixth form. One student commented, 'This is more than just a school', and students acknowledge the opportunities the school offers them. They contribute to the life of the school in a variety of ways through the sixth form council and other responsibilities in the main school. Students appreciate the high quality care, support and guidance they receive. They are well informed about their targets and what to do to improve. The sixth form is increasing in size, with many students joining from other schools. The number completing their courses has improved over recent years. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good, and the monitoring and intervention strategies now in place focus on realising students' full potential. The uptake of specialist technology subjects has improved. Sixth form students receive good and timely support for university applications and in selecting appropriate courses.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop more rigour and challenge in the learning opportunities in all lessons.
- Make more effective use of data.
- Ensure that development planning prioritises the few key issues that will have the most impact on raising standards.

A small proportion of the 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 join the school in Year 7 with standards in line with national expectations. They attain average standards in their Key Stage 3 assessments. By the end of Year 11, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades in GCSE examinations and the percentage including English and mathematics is comparable with those nationally. Standards have improved gradually in recent years in line with national trends. The school has worked hard to implement strategies to improve attainment, including tracking and monitoring procedures, but these have yet to make a significant impact on overall examination results. There are strengths in some subjects where pupils achieve higher than expected results at GCSE, particularly media studies, music and religious studies. In most subjects, pupils leave school with a qualification and all pupils who sit GCSE in English and mathematics achieve a grade. Most pupils make particularly good progress in mathematics at Key Stage 4. The progress made by some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is better than expected in both English and mathematics.

The sixth form has a wide ability entry policy, admitting students from other local schools. Standards when leaving the sixth form in 2008 were in line with the national average. However, the number achieving the higher grades was well below the national average. AS level students attained standards above those of schools nationally. Given their starting points, sixth form students make good progress, although inconsistencies remain in standards between subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They clearly understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle. There is a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities with high levels of participation. Eating healthily is encouraged in the curriculum, particularly in food technology. The school's catering provision has been reviewed and a new contractor now offers a good range of healthy food, although not all students choose the healthy options. Students feel that the school is a safe and friendly place to be.

The school has recently introduced a house system based on the names of the planets. This idea was the result of a school competition, the planets reflecting the school's technology status. The house system has been successful in strengthening relationships between younger and older students and developing an inclusive, cohesive community.

The school has devised some good strategies to tackle low attendance and poor punctuality. Attendance has improved significantly over the last year and is now very close to the national average. This has been achieved by the good use of attendance data with students and parents, effective use of rewards, and by extensive input from the attendance officers, including many home visits. Exclusion levels are declining and the school has an effective inclusion programme. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Wide-ranging support activities are popular, including the extra-curricular achievement groups. Out-of-school activities provide good opportunities for social development through working in teams and with significant adult role models. Students have a good and developing range of opportunities to take responsibility, for example as prefects, house captains, paired reading with younger students and in the school youth council, and undertake them well. Students benefit from a well organised two-week programme of work experience which provides a good insight into the skills and qualities needed in the workplace and prepares them well for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning in the main school is satisfactory overall. Inspectors observed some good and outstanding lessons, and none that was inadequate. The school has given a high priority to developing teaching and learning in the last three years. This is beginning to bear fruit in lesson planning and structure but has not yet accelerated the progress made by students. In the best lessons, teachers challenge students appropriately using effective questioning techniques and a range of engaging tasks, adapting their teaching in the light of students' responses. This leads to high levels of achievement. In the less successful lessons, the pace of learning is not quick enough during whole-class discussions and teachers do not challenge students rigorously enough to explain their answers. As a result, students make more limited, although satisfactory, progress. Some good practice exists in assessment for learning, marking and giving feedback, which helps students understand how to improve the quality of their work in some subjects. However, this is not consistent across all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory in the main school. It is largely broad and balanced, with statutory requirements in place apart from too few lessons of physical education in Key Stage 4. The school has responded appropriately to the flexibility offered by the new programmes of study by incorporating the development of personal, thinking and learning skills into Year 7 schemes of work and themed days. Some vocational options have been added to the Key Stage 4 curriculum since the last inspection, for example, students can take the Youth Award Scheme or a Level 1 BTEC in travel and tourism. In addition, more able students can opt for statistics or media studies. However, these alternative curriculum opportunities are not yet extensive enough to meet the needs of all learners, although there are more planned. The good programme of extra-curricular provision includes a large number of sporting activities. Uptake is increasing, with some older students leading activities, thus contributing to students' personal development and well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students enjoy their lessons and speak positively about the advice and guidance they receive from teachers. They are particularly pleased with the additional activities that are run after school, for example, where they can get help with homework and take part in arts and sporting activities. They feel these benefit them in terms of their personal development and have a positive impact on their confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to develop positive attitudes and take increasing responsibility for their actions. Some students spoke of their willingness to take part in a school-wide approach in helping build a more harmonious working environment for all students.

Students new to the school value the good support they receive to help them settle quickly. There is a low incidence of bullying, and students say that any incidents are dealt with promptly if they do occur. The guidance students receive about their progress and how they can improve is a mixed picture. There are good examples of marking as well as less helpful ones. The school is actively working to improve the tracking systems to ensure teachers use them to inform their lesson plans. Currently, the information about students' performance is not used rigorously enough to maximise their potential, nor is it always matched to the needs of individual and different groups of students. Those in most need receive good mentoring support from significant adults and positive role models.

Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are tracked well so that their particular needs are met. They receive good support from outside agencies. All staff are highly committed to providing good care and guidance. The popular and successful 'achievement groups' organised after school provide high quality and effective support and motivation for students with a range of complex needs. These groups have a positive impact on the attainment of those attending. Safeguarding procedures are robust.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school is led by a dedicated headteacher who is well respected by the school community. The school is a cohesive community. He is supported by an able leadership team committed to raising standards. They have high expectations of the middle managers, providing them with good support and professional development opportunities. Middle managers in return have responded to the challenges of departmental self-evaluation and review. Data are more accepted and valued now by managers at all levels as a key tool for identifying and acting on students' underachievement, although they are not yet used effectively. Self-evaluation - although some judgements are slightly generous - identifies appropriate development points. However, whole-school development planning lacks clarity, especially in identifying the few key points for raising standards and setting frequent milestones so that all senior leaders can measure the impact of their actions. The school's attainment targets are insufficiently challenging.

Governance is satisfactory. The school acknowledges that governors support the school well as critical friends, but are still developing their ability to hold the school to account for its standards. External partners involved with the school are very positive about their involvement and enjoy coming into school and working with the school staff and students. One commented, 'The school is prepared to go the extra mile to support students.' Parents too, report the good communication networks established with the school and appreciate the way they are kept up to date with their child's progress.

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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?	3	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

16 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of John Willmott School, Sutton Coldfield, B75 7DY

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave the other inspectors and me when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection and what the school could do to become even better. Your school is currently satisfactory but improving. Your results are good in the specialist technology subjects and some of the other subjects, but this is not the case in all subjects, where you could do better. The sixth form is good and there is a wide range of courses for you to study, some at other local schools.

The care, guidance and support the school provides for all of you are good. Those of you who need extra help get good support from teachers or other adults. The teachers work hard for you and some of you told us how you feel that the quality of teaching and students' behaviour has improved over the last few years. I think the marshals are a good idea and you obviously like to see their friendly faces around the school each day. You develop into confident, articulate young adults and I was impressed with your head girl and deputy head boy and how positive they were about the school. Your attendance has improved but is still not as good as it should be. If you stay off school, you will find it harder to catch up with your work and achieve your full potential, so some of you need to make more effort to get to school every day.

Your headteacher and all the staff are really committed to improving the school and I think that the school, with your help, will attain even higher standards over the next few years.

In order to make the school even better I have asked the headteacher and senior staff to do three things.

- Make learning more challenging and exciting in lessons.
- Ensure all staff use your assessments and test results more effectively to set challenging targets for you.
- Ensure that the school's action plan concentrates on the few key areas needed to raise standards in the school.

Yours faithfully

Clive Kempton

Her Majesty's Inspector