

# The Woodlands School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	103730
<b>Local Authority</b>	Coventry
<b>Inspection number</b>	323890
<b>Inspection dates</b>	11–12 February 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Clive Kempton HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	897
Sixth form	103
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Walter Dye
<b>Headteacher</b>	Neil Charlton
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 October 2000
<b>School address</b>	Broad Lane Coventry CV5 7FF
<b>Telephone number</b>	024 76462634
<b>Fax number</b>	024 76467190

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The Woodlands School is a boys' school serving the south-western part of Coventry. It has a fully comprehensive intake, taking students from the locality and across the city. It became a specialist sports college in 2003 and has some excellent sporting facilities, used extensively by the local community as well as its students. The school's thriving sixth form is run in partnership with a local girls' school and is known as the West Coventry Sixth Form (WCSF). It also works in close collaboration with a local federation of schools. The school is set in 54 acres and has listed building status. The school is in the first wave of Coventry's Building Schools for the Future project and will undergo a £20 million rebuilding and refurbishment programme in the near future. The majority of students are White British. The school has an above average number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

The Woodlands is a good school with a strong sense of family, where standards have improved considerably. One parent commented, 'My sons chose to come to Woodlands; they have developed into mature young adults.' The school has acted on the recommendations of the last inspection and the sixth form is now good, science standards have improved, inadequate teaching has been eliminated, and the behaviour of the boys is good. While the fabric of the building remains poor, with the exception of the impressive sports facilities, a major rebuild of the school has been agreed and is due to begin in 2010. All of this has happened because of the good leadership provided by the headteacher and his dogged determination to change the culture of low aspirations and underachievement.

Students enter the school with standards similar to those found nationally. They make good progress in mathematics and science, although not as much progress in English. This has largely been due to staffing issues in English, and the lack of a rigorous whole-school focus on developing literacy across the curriculum. As a result, standards at Key Stage 4 overall are in line with national averages, and are suppressed by the lower attainment in English. Students that are more vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are especially well supported and make good progress. Students also make good progress and attain above average standards in the sixth form.

A particular strength of the school is the house system. It is very well regarded by parents and other stakeholders. They report that students are known as individuals and that communication between home and school is very effective. Students eat their lunch together in the house blocks and mix socially with other year groups and staff. This supports their good personal development and well-being. Older students look out for the younger ones. The relationships between staff and students are good. They know the students well and the care, guidance and support they receive are good and appropriate to their needs.

The school has developed an accelerated curriculum where students spend only two years in Key Stage 3 and three years in Key Stage 4. Whilst there are some teething problems with this new initiative, generally it has been one of the key catalysts for rapid whole-school improvement, enhancing the achievement culture in the school, developing students' self-esteem and raising staff expectations. The good curriculum also supports students well as it is now much more tailored to their needs. The wide range of courses available in the main school ensures that students are guided to courses that suit their particular academic or vocational interests. Of note is the new Engineering Diploma. Here, students spend part of their time out of school in local industry where they can see a purposeful application for their studies. The collaborative sixth-form curriculum is also good, allowing students to follow a wide range of courses. Boys are taught with girls from the local girls' school on both sites or in other local schools and colleges as part of the South West Federation of Schools.

The quality of teaching is good. All the lessons seen were satisfactory or better and a growing percentage are good or better. However, the school acknowledges that there is still work to do to improve the consistency of good teaching and enhance its impact. For example, the learning objectives in some lessons lack clarity and teachers do not check frequently enough if students understand the work.

Leadership and management throughout the school are good. The vision of the headteacher is supported by other senior leaders and together they have become a potent force for change.

Nearly all middle leaders have also embraced the new achievement culture. Well-grounded academic tracking data confidently predict standards improving year on year. The sports college status has had a major impact on the school and its community. Some students represent county and national teams, and over 2000 members of the local community take part in activities each week.

■ Effectiveness of the sixth form Grade: 2

The well-managed partnership within the WCSF has enabled a wide range of courses to be developed in the sixth form. This, together with a strong focus on teaching and learning, has led to the raising of students' attainment since the last inspection. Teaching in the sixth form is at least satisfactory and generally good. Teachers have warm and supportive relationships with students and give them effective guidance for their transition to higher education. Students can choose from a good range of subjects which meets most of their needs. While the integrated curriculum with a local girls' school increases the cost effectiveness of sixth-form classes, some are small in number, limiting opportunities for critical discussion and key communication and team skills. The sixth form is led and managed well by an inspiring leader who has made a significant impact on improving provision since the last inspection.

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### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that the learning objectives in all lessons have clear and measurable success criteria, are accessible to students, and are regularly checked throughout the lesson.
- Improve subject leadership in English and raise standards in literacy across the curriculum.

### **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

Standards have been below average for a number of years but rose considerably in 2008. In most subjects, progress over Key Stages 3 to 4 is now good and improving, reflecting the creative approach the school has had to developments in teaching and learning. However, progress has been more limited in English, with results not showing the improved standards evident elsewhere across the curriculum. The accelerated curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 contributes to these improvements with a stronger academic focus and tighter programmes of study. The 'Year 8 dip' of slower progress has been eliminated and the personalised curriculum in Year 11, which the accelerated curriculum enables, is both popular and successful, enhancing students' motivation and preparing them well for post-16 study.

The employment of efficient data tracking and the setting of students' targets based on past progress have raised standards. They indicate that the improved standards attained in 2008 will be sustained in 2009 and thereafter. Efficient use of data tracking is, however, at a developmental stage in the English department. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making good progress, and for those on School Action Plus, this is particularly notable.

In the sixth form, the motivating influence of collaborative courses within the local federation has led to good progress and standards at A2 level. However, AS performance has dipped over the previous year, with results significantly lower than those of the local girls' school in the partnership. This has led to the school developing strategies for tighter enrolment and more structured counselling.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The spiritual development of students is good. They are respectful when provided with opportunities for reflection in assemblies. They also show good moral attitudes and social development, as shown by the positive relationships with their peers and adults, as well as their understanding and observance of the school rules. One of the many benefits of gaining sports specialist status has been the considerable development of the sports facilities. This has increased the access of students to sporting opportunities, as well as being a catalyst for development of community links. Students develop an active lifestyle through the extensive sporting and other physical activities available. For example, 62% of Year 8 students take part in after-school sports clubs. The school actively promotes healthy eating but is constrained by the current lack of appropriate dining facilities. Students move safely in and around the school. They engage sensibly together, and are not unduly concerned about bullying. They know what to do if any incidents occur, and are confident that students with responsibility in their house or the staff will deal with them quickly and effectively. Students say, and their parents confirm, that they enjoy coming to school. This is demonstrated in their engagement during lessons as well as their willingness to complete activities.

Attendance is now satisfactory. It has steadily improved, due to a number of new measures that the school has implemented, such as text messaging and the use of rewards. One parent commented, 'The rewards system is excellent.' Students' behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school. They take an interest in their own learning and are prepared to listen to and learn from one another in lessons, as well as from their teachers. They make a positive contribution to the school community, for example through the strong house system, and through raising money for a variety of local and national charities, including MacMillan Nurses. One sixth-form student said that the house system is, 'like Hogwarts'. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is currently only satisfactory, due to the lower attainment in English. Students are well supported by the Connexions service in making career choices. Their development as independent learners is satisfactory, and their improving skills of teamwork and cooperation will stand them in good stead for the future.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, despite some inconsistencies in the levels of challenge and pace seen in some lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and lessons are well planned to include a variety of learning styles which successfully engage the students. They make good progress as a result. Behaviour and relationships are good throughout the school and students enjoy their lessons. The quality of marking has improved since the last inspection and students were able to demonstrate how teachers' comments on their work have helped them to improve. Good use is made of grade and level criteria to help the students achieve well.

In the most effective lessons observed, learning objectives were sharply focused and shared using language that the students could understand, enabling them to achieve well as they were very clear about what they needed to do to be successful. Progress towards the lesson objectives was checked at appropriate points, and students were given opportunities to think for themselves and engage in lively discussion. Not all lessons demonstrated these strengths, however. Where teaching was less effective, although the learning objectives were shared with the students, they were not always able to articulate their understanding of them and there were missed opportunities for teachers to check on progress and to consolidate the learning during the lesson.

Literacy across the curriculum is underdeveloped. Staff have undergone some training, but literacy strategies are not yet embedded enough in their practice to have an impact on students' progress. There is inconsistent emphasis on subject-specific language development for discussion and to support writing. Opportunities for group discussions or for students to

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum is good overall and meets statutory requirements. Parents say, 'The accelerated curriculum works – it keeps the boys engaged.' Indeed, the accelerated curriculum has made a considerable contribution to the evident motivation and recent improvement in GCSE results of the students. The increased flexibility that the accelerated approach allows means that a very diverse and appealing range of courses are offered to extend and enrich the curriculum, especially for Year 11. For example, students can choose from an extensive range of GCSE, BTEC, AS and Diploma certificated courses, and can further enrich their education by studying forensic science, plumbing, animation and survival skills, to mention just a few. They are all also expected to further their skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology at a level relevant to their ability.

The federation with other local sixth forms means that there is an extensive range of sixth-form courses on offer, especially at AS and A2 level. The sports college specialism has had a positive impact on the curriculum by facilitating the very broad range of sports-related courses offered, and there have been trips abroad with a sports focus, including a recent visit to South America. Cultural extra-curricular opportunities are less well developed.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

Risk assessments are in place for trips and for some practical subjects, although currently they are not as well developed for non-practical subjects. A file is kept centrally of any accidents. There is a high level of commitment from staff to provide good quality care for students. One parent commented, 'Every boy is known by the staff.' The close collaboration between school staff and external agencies has enabled vulnerable learners to be identified and appropriate support strategies applied, for example the breakfast intervention club.

Good links have been developed with parents and students. Individual education plans are shared and agreed, and staff are able to access these online as they are updated to inform their teaching. Students are set targets that are placed in their planners and used for academic monitoring, which takes place with their tutor and subject staff. As a result of the good guidance students receive, only four of the students who left Year 11 last year did not go into further education, employment or training. Over 60% of Year 13 have continued on to higher education, and the others into further training, a gap year or employment. The school complies with the current government requirements for safeguarding and has one Single Central Record.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

The leadership of the headteacher, with the support of managers at all levels is successfully changing the learning culture in the school and its community, despite some considerable barriers such as the poor state of the buildings. There are now much higher aspirations for students than at the time of the last inspection. This year, the number of boys attaining five or more higher grades at GCSE has risen by a staggering 24%. Self-evaluation is accurate, and improvement planning at whole-school and middle management level has improved. Whilst whole-school planning has clear targets and measurable success criteria, subject output targets are less comprehensive. Rigorous annual department reviews conducted by the senior leadership team hold each subject department to account for the standards attained, and set the agenda for further improvement.

Governance is good. Governors are regular visitors in school and support its work. They hold the headteacher to account for standards attained. Community cohesion is currently satisfactory. There is a strong sense of identity within the school and its local community, especially through the sports college links, but there is still work to do to develop pupils' understanding of the wider United Kingdom community. Outside professionals who work with the students and other agencies involved with the school speak warmly of the welcome they receive when they come into the school, the friendliness of the students and how willing the staff are to engage with them on new initiatives. One described the school as 'open to new ideas and having a strong commitment to individual students'. Parents are very positive about the school too, and report that communication with the school is good. They like the open door policy of the headteacher and senior staff, and particularly the house system. They know that if they have a problem they can contact the school, and it will be dealt with.



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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	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	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	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/or disabilities make progress	2	

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<sup>1</sup>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.

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	3	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	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

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2	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	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	

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

13 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Woodlands School, Coventry CV5 7FF

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and the inspection team when we visited your school earlier this term. 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 you and your teachers could do to further improve the school.

- I think you go to a good school that has improved a lot since the last time it was inspected.
- You have a good headteacher who has pulled everyone together to work hard for your benefit.
- The house system works really well. The social opportunities you have throughout the day in the house block with staff and other year groups help you to develop into confident young men who are proud of their achievements.
- I don't think some of the buildings look very attractive, and I am really pleased that you are going to have a new school built on the site, with state-of-the-art facilities, just like your impressive sports complex.
- You obviously enjoy sport, and the fact that many local sports clubs are based at the school means that you will be able to continue with them even when you have left.
- Your teachers work really hard for you and are constantly trying to improve the quality of their teaching.
- You have lots of opportunities to take subjects that interest you.
- The sixth form is really good and also offers a wide range of subjects, either in school or at other local schools.
- Those of you who need extra help get really good support from teachers and other adults and you make good progress as a result.

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

- Make sure that teachers clearly tell you what you are going to learn in each lesson, and check that you are learning it throughout the lesson.
- Raise standards in literacy in all subjects.

Clive Kempton

Her Majesty's Inspector.