

Wardle High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105852
Local Authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	324285
Inspection dates	8–9 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Janet Palmer HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1145
Sixth form	120
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Susan Taylor
Headteacher	Dr Graham Wright
Date of previous school inspection	21 March 2007
School address	Birch Road Wardle Rochdale Lancashire OL12 9RD
Telephone number	01706 373911
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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

Wardle High is a larger than average school. There are more boys than girls. It has held specialist status for the performing arts since 2003. Most students come from the local area where socio-economic circumstances are broadly average. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is average. Almost all students are White British, with only a small number from other backgrounds. The school is resourced for physically impaired students. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, although the percentage with a statement of special educational need is a little above average. The school achieved a leading edge award for music in 2007; it has the Artsmark and Healthy Schools awards as well as Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wardle High is a good school that provides its students with outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. The exceptional leadership of the headteacher and senior team is a significant factor in its success. The great majority of parents who voiced their opinion showed good support for the school, its staff and leaders. 'I am grateful that my son is receiving his education from a school with staff who want the best for my child as I myself do', is typical of the supportive comments from parents.

Senior leaders and governors have produced and implemented sharply focused systems for improvement following a prolonged period of low standards and achievement. As a result, the achievement of students has risen sharply and standards are now above average. Astute appointments to the leadership team have created a strong group with complementary strengths. A system of distributed leadership, accompanied by high levels of accountability, operates outstandingly well in all aspects of the school's work. Staff feel empowered and this has created a culture of high expectation that permeates all of the school's activities. Issues from the previous inspection have been dealt with thoroughly. The quality of teaching and learning is now good and the curriculum meets students' needs well.

Students enjoy their lessons. They respect their teachers who have high expectations of their work and behaviour. Strong relationships underpin teaching and learning across the school so that lesson time is used very effectively. Teachers have good subject knowledge, enabling them to explain clearly what students are expected to learn. In the best lessons students are beginning to develop independent learning skills. This is particularly noticeable in Year 7 where the 'transformational curriculum' encourages students to think for themselves. Students in other years have fewer opportunities to develop independence and this is an area that the school has rightly identified as a priority for development.

The curriculum has been extensively developed and now caters for the needs and aspirations of all learners. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has been broadened and the new virtual learning environment is beginning to make a positive impact on the way students work, learn and review their progress. Students enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular options and are very proud of their school's performing arts status. In the performing arts students make a positive contribution to the wider community through their high levels of achievement in national brass band competitions and through work with other groups in drama and musical productions. There is a very strong sense of community within the school, promoted by carefully fostered relationships between students of different ages and between students and staff. This highly inclusive school works well in improving the confidence, aspirations and achievement of all students in its care, including those with additional needs. The planning, monitoring and evaluation of pastoral arrangements from Year 6 into the school and throughout to post-16, are exemplary. Students are aware that all forms of bullying and discrimination are unacceptable and they are confident that where such incidents occur, they are swiftly and effectively dealt with by the school.

Governors are exceptionally well informed, enabling them to hold the school to account robustly for its performance. Leaders' and managers' success in transforming achievement and behaviour over a sustained period gives the school an outstanding capacity to improve. It provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students enter the sixth form with attainment levels that are broadly in line with the national average. Standards in the sixth form are satisfactory, and in 2008 students in the sixth form made satisfactory progress. Results are better at AS level than at A level. Students are making slow and steady improvement over time and current achievement, as seen in lessons and through the school's tracking data, is now good. In 2008, 60% gained a place at university with the great majority securing their first choice.

The sixth form is well led and managed. There is a careful and rigorous analysis of performance in all areas and an overriding concern to meet the needs of individual students, whose views are listened to closely. Students display mature attitudes to their work; they appreciate the excellent care and guidance they are given and value highly the strong relationships with their teachers. Students involve themselves in a range of enrichment activities and enjoy supporting younger students in their roles as buddies and mentors. Their impact in many areas of school life is very positive resulting in their good personal development.

Students pursue a balanced academic curriculum with a wide and growing range of subjects matched to their strengths and potential career choices. Careers advice is excellent and students are very well supported when applying for university entrance. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subjects and challenge students to higher levels of thought through good questioning and opportunities to discuss and express opinions. Students are assessed regularly and the robust data generated are used effectively to set challenging targets. The improved systems for tracking students' progress are beginning to result in effective action to improve achievement and raise standards. A range of successful intervention strategies indicate a good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enable students to develop their independent learning skills in lessons.
- Improve standards in the sixth form, particularly at A level.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

When students join the school their attainment is broadly average. During their time at the school they make good progress, particularly in English where a high proportion achieved above the level expected for their age at the end of Key Stage 3, and in mathematics where students consistently reach above average standards at Key Stage 4. In 2008, the percentage of students achieving five or more good grades at GCSE including English and mathematics was above the national average, demonstrating good standards overall. The proportion who achieved at least five GCSE passes at grades A* to G was considerably better than the national average, indicating good attainment across the ability range. Robust tracking data provided by the school show that current students are making good progress in relation to their starting points and that their attainment is good. This was borne out in lessons where students across the school were observed to be achieving well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They behave well, are personable, polite and respectful. Students are very supportive of the school's new behaviour policy which they say has resulted in improved attitudes and a reduction in incidents of bullying. Students have good awareness of how to stay safe and healthy; this is helped by healthy options in school dinners and the wide range of popular extra-curricular sports on offer. Students enjoy the good opportunities to learn about and to reflect on different cultures, values and religions through English, religious studies, art, music and assemblies. They also enjoy enterprise activities that help to develop their team work and creativity. Students are well prepared for adult life. As a result, their take up of courses and training after school is high. Their attendance is in line with the national average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Typical lessons are well planned to meet students' individual needs and to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers and teaching assistants provide a good level of support, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students show good attitudes to their work and make good progress as a result. Most teaching skilfully engages students in tasks that appeal to them, so that they enjoy learning. In the best lessons teachers use questioning very effectively to build knowledge and understanding and employ ICT well to add pace and interest. Students take good responsibility for their own learning through self-assessment. In the few satisfactory lessons observed the teacher dominated the discourse and provided too few opportunities for students to engage actively with the learning. The marking of students' work is good. Teachers give helpful comments so students know what to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The new curriculum in Year 7 is successfully developing students' learning skills and competencies and enabling them to get off to a good start. The Year 8 and 9 curriculum has been enriched and now offers a 'progress' course for students requiring additional help and a second language for more able and gifted students. Students are well prepared for Key Stage 4 which now has rich and varied pathways and a choice of both academic and vocational options to suit all groups of learners. The curriculum is enhanced by links with employers, other schools, colleges and universities. Careers guidance is very strong, contributing to very high numbers moving on to further education, employment or training. The specialism offers a wide range of courses and a diverse enrichment programme, linking well with both community and partner schools. Overall the provision for, and participation in, extra-curricular activities is good and caters for all groups in school. An outstanding contribution is made by a variety of school bands with high levels of participation and a level of quality that is recognised nationally.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding and contributes very well to students' sense of well-being and achievement. This is due to the dedication and commitment of a wide range of highly qualified specialist staff and teaching assistants. They effectively use strategies to promote academic progress, good relationships, behaviour and attendance and the school has excellent liaison with a diverse range of partners. Students speak very highly about these arrangements and parents agree overwhelmingly that this is a very caring and supportive school. The implementation of the positive discipline strategy has led to improvements in behaviour and in major reductions to fixed-term exclusions. Alongside this, the introduction of mixed-age tutor groups has resulted in a harmonious and orderly school environment where students take care of each other. In this safe and supportive environment, students achieve well. Procedures to ensure health and safety, including those for child protection are in place and secure.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The headteacher's determination, vision and leadership have been central to the school's success. Leaders are particularly good at identifying and nurturing teachers' expertise and providing opportunities for their professional progress; as a result, middle management is very strong. All innovations are carefully monitored for effectiveness and modified where necessary to ensure that they provide good value in raising the quality of provision for students. The school's specialist performing arts status is used exceptionally well to enhance the curriculum and as a result, music in the school is a beacon of excellence. There is a strong commitment to include all students and ensure all forms of discrimination and barriers to learning are eliminated so that the needs of every individual are met. Key factors in the good progress students make are the exemplary and rigorous monitoring of their progress and systems to remedy identified underachievement. Excellent links with parents and outside agencies support the school's work and promote good community cohesion.

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?	1	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	3
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	

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?	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?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	1	
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**

Inspection of Wardle High School, Rochdale, OL12 9RD

As you know, your school was inspected recently. I would like to begin by thanking you for making the team of inspectors feel so welcome. Our discussions with you were particularly useful in helping us find out about the quality of education at Wardle High. Our overall judgements are that the education you receive is good in both the school and in the sixth form and that some aspects are outstanding.

These are the main things that we found during our visit.

- Leadership and management by the headteacher, senior and middle leaders are outstanding. Your personal development, achievement and well-being are at the heart of everything they do.
- You make good progress during your time at the school and good progress in the sixth form. The 2008 GCSE results were the best in the school's history and above the national average. Standards in the sixth form were in line with the national average in 2008 and we have recommended that the school works to raise standards, particularly at A level.
- Your teachers have good knowledge of their subjects. They know how well you are doing and provide good, individual support. In the best lessons you are encouraged to become creative and independent learners and we have recommended that this is adopted as good practice across the school.
- You show good attitudes to learning and your behaviour is good in lessons and around the school generally. You support each other well in the school, acting as buddies and mentors to younger students.
- You receive outstanding care, guidance and support. Staff know you as individuals and are always willing to put themselves out to provide extra help if you need it. This is particularly the case for students with additional needs.
- The curriculum is much improved and is now well matched to your needs through a good range of academic and vocational options at Key Stage 4.
- Through the school's performing arts specialist status you make a very good contribution to the school and wider community. The contributions made by the many bands and through the drama productions are most commendable.

You are rightly proud to be members of Wardle High School. Your teachers and the staff have worked hard to bring about improvements and they want to carry on doing this. You can help them by continuing to work hard and making the most of the opportunities the school provides.

I would like to wish you all the very best for a happy and successful future.