

Wickersley School and Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106955
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	324495
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Philip Jarrett HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1842
Sixth form	400
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sally Underwood
Headteacher	Mr David Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	Bawtry Road Wickersley Rotherham South Yorkshire S66 1JL
Telephone number	01709 542147
Fax number	01709 703364

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Wickersley School and Sports College is a very large comprehensive school for students aged 11 to 18. It is a specialist sports college, with science as the second subject. The school was invited to be a high performing specialist school in 2006 and now has an additional specialism in mathematics and computing. The number of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, although there are above average numbers of students with a statement of educational need. The school has provision for the education of students with hearing impairment. Most students are of White British heritage. The school has received a number of awards including the Healthy Schools Outstanding Practice award and Excellence in Enterprise Education. The school's facilities are used by a wide range of community groups, particularly for sport.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Wickersley School and Sports College is an outstanding school. This is primarily because it has an unrelenting focus on outcomes for students that have led to consistent and substantial rises in standards over recent years. At the same time, the school has worked effectively to ensure that the needs of all students, including the most vulnerable, are met. There is a welcoming and inclusive ethos that contributes significantly to the excellent personal development of students.

The school is very highly regarded by the vast majority of parents. Parents say that their children are happy in school, grow in confidence and make very good progress. This was confirmed by the inspection. The school has a calm and friendly atmosphere. Relationships are strong and students behave exceptionally well. They are polite, courteous and welcoming to visitors. They enjoy coming to school, work hard and take good advantage of the very wide range of extra-curricular activities available.

The success of the school is firmly based on the excellent leadership of the headteacher. He provides vision, a clear sense of direction and very high expectations. As a result, standards have risen substantially and are well above average at the end of Key Stage 4. This reflects excellent achievement by all groups of students. Well planned actions have also improved provision in the sixth form and provisional results in 2008 showed good progress by those students. Despite already high standards, there is no hint of complacency about the school. The senior leaders expect standards to improve further each year and the use of very challenging targets has ensured that this happens.

A very small number of parents expressed the view that the school was excessively focused on targets and attainment. This was not the judgement of the inspection team. The school has continued to widen its curriculum across Key Stages 3 and 4 and this meets the needs of students very well. The enrichment programme is very impressive. As one student said, 'I enjoy coming to school because there's always something happening.' Provision for sport makes a significant contribution to healthy lifestyles and the varied opportunities in other areas such as dance and drama enable students to work together, show independence and develop the skills needed for later life. Arrangements for guiding and supporting students are outstanding. Students feel safe in school. The school monitors their academic progress and personal development very closely and support is well targeted at vulnerable students and others in need of extra help.

The school has met or exceeded all of its specialist school targets and its status as a sports college is having a very good impact on the work of the school. As a result of its success, the school was offered a second specialism in 2007. Constantly improving standards, a whole-school culture of very high expectations and a clear sense of direction to the school's work mean that the capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision for the sixth form has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Retention rates are good, and students enjoy their learning in all subjects. Standards have risen and are currently above average across the range of courses in 2008. Achievement has also improved and is now good.

The school has taken a number of effective measures to improve students' personal development and well-being including an extensive enrichment programme, with high levels of sports participation, and other programmes to encourage healthy living. Lessons observed in the sixth form were of good quality with many teachers using a wide range of approaches to engage students. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being through a range of enterprise activities. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, such as those in the school's specialist hearing impairment support unit, are given the help they need by teaching assistants to access the curriculum. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Students' progress is monitored carefully leading to quick response to any academic underperformance or personal difficulties. Students appreciate the range of opportunities available to them and many are attracted to the sixth form from other schools after Year 11. A number of measures have already been taken to improve provision further but some need more time to impact fully on achievement and standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in the sixth form, building on the outstanding practice already available across Key Stages 3 and 4.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards on entry to the school are broadly average. Results at the end of Key Stage 4 are consistently well above average and this confirms that students' achievement across Key Stages 3 and 4 is outstanding. Standards have continued to rise since the previous inspection, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4, and the school uses these results to set even higher targets for future performance. All groups of students, including students from minority ethnic groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve equally highly. This is partly because the school monitors the achievement of very specific groups carefully and plans intervention well to meet their needs. For example, the performance of boys was identified as an area of weakness in the past; in 2008, their provisional GCSE results were broadly the same as girls. Results in English have not been as strong as in the other core subjects, particularly at the end of Key Stage 3. However, standards are now rising and the progress of students in GCSE English language improved substantially in 2008.

Standards have also improved in the sixth form. Results in the vocational courses have generally been above average. Standards in A level courses have tended to be broadly in line with average but early indicators show they were better than that in 2008. The achievement of students overall has improved and is now good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. They know what is expected of them and they treat each other and staff with respect. They are confident in expressing their ideas and show very positive attitudes to learning. Very good relationships between teachers and students help students to make outstanding progress. Students enjoy lessons, especially where they are given opportunities to work independently from their teacher.

There is a harmonious and calm atmosphere in the school. Students adopt safe practices and say they feel safe from bullying. They have confidence that staff will deal effectively with any

issues that arise. Students participate well in the extensive trips and extra-curricular activities available and this benefits their social and cultural development. Students' spiritual development is good but not as strong as other aspects, partly because of the limited time available for assemblies and form tutor sessions.

Attendance is above average. Students say that they enjoy coming to school and parents confirm this. Students develop a very good understanding of what is needed for a healthy lifestyle. Their experience of a wide range of sporting activities contributes significantly to this, supported by opportunities in the very successful personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme.

Students make a positive contribution to the school and the local community. They contribute well to charity events and sometimes organise events themselves. They work productively in neighbouring schools and the local community. Students are given opportunities through the school council to contribute to future developments although there are limited opportunities for some students to take on leadership and the sixth form council's work tends to focus on organising social events and community work. The vast majority of students develop the skills necessary for their future economic well-being and this success is reflected in the very high numbers who go on into further education, training or employment after they leave the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The overall quality of teaching and learning is outstanding, as shown in the excellent progress made by students. This partly reflects the impact of the school's robust quality assurance system, as well as its provision of numerous opportunities for teachers to learn from training and to share good practice.

Features of the most effective lessons observed included very good subject knowledge, excellent relationships with students and successful classroom management. Excellent behaviour and positive attitudes contribute to very good learning by students. In outstanding lessons there were high expectations and approaches that encouraged students to think for themselves. In these lessons students were given opportunities to work together and develop independent learning skills. For example, in an expressive arts lesson students enjoyed working independently from the teacher and taking responsibility during rehearsals for the school play. In the sixth form the best lessons observed allowed students to develop their capacity for independent learning and helped them to understand how to achieve the highest grade in their next examination.

In lessons that were not as successful the teacher's role was too dominant. There was an over-reliance on whole-class teaching which did not always meet the needs of different groups of students. In these lessons, teachers were also less successful at managing discussion sessions and were too eager to answer their own questions. In less effective lessons in the sixth form the more able students were not sufficiently challenged.

Teaching meets the needs of vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities very well because it is personalised and flexible, helping them to make appropriate progress. In most lessons students received good feedback on their learning. Marking is of good quality, especially in the sixth form, although students overall are not always clear enough about the next steps in their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding because the school offers a wide range of academic and alternative courses which satisfy the needs of all students. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced and includes the opportunity for all students to obtain qualifications in one or more of French, Spanish, and information and communication technology (ICT) at the end of Year 9. The curriculum for younger students is also enhanced by additional literacy support for those who need it and a new course integrating enterprise education and personal learning and thinking skills, designed to promote students' ability to be independent learners and prepare them for the world of work. The PSHE programme delivers high quality learning on health and citizenship. One particularly impressive Year 7 lesson was observed in which students were developing an excellent appreciation of the impact of disabilities on people's lives.

In Years 10 and 11 all students study a broad mix of academic and alternative courses. The school aims to provide the best and most appropriate course for each individual student and specialised programmes are designed for students who are less academic or for vulnerable students. Current examples include a retail course delivered in partnership with a local shopping centre, a construction course at a neighbouring training centre and a variety of options accessed through other training providers. All routes enable students to gain an appropriate range of qualifications and to progress to the next stage of education or the world of work.

Subject-based residential trips provide additional opportunities for students to develop revision and examination skills and there is a full range of booster sessions for students in all key stages. The school also provides a wide range of enterprise activities and work-related learning. Parents comment that the education provided helps their children to prepare well for adult life. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities promotes responsibility, enjoyment and community contribution. Boys and girls immerse themselves in activities ranging from football competitions, dance classes, a wide range of music and drama productions, and trips and visits locally, nationally and internationally.

Sports college status has had a positive impact on the curriculum. For example, all students study GCSE physical education. Consequently, there is a much wider range of activities from which students can select, including rock climbing, canoeing and sailing. Although still in its early stages, the school's second specialism of mathematics and computing has enabled the school to develop its virtual learning environment (VLE) across the school and beyond. All subject areas are now using the VLE to provide increased flexibility for students in accessing information.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The high quality care and attention provided for students enables them to make outstanding progress academically and in their personal development. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive very good support from an able staff team. Vulnerable students are well supported and the school is proactive in liaising with relevant support agencies to meet their needs. Learning mentors provide effective support through regular student reviews and good communication of targets to parents. Arrangements for safeguarding students' welfare are in place.

Very effective tracking and monitoring systems are used well to identify underperformance, leading to targeted support for individual students. This enables students to make excellent progress. Most students know their targets and say that they receive very good guidance and support from teachers in reaching their targets.

Good transition from primary school enables students to settle quickly into school life. Students enjoy a comprehensive and effective induction programme that enables their personal needs to be met. For example, younger students said that the day spent at a local abbey when they were still in Year 6 made transition much smoother for them. Transition to employment or further education is also well managed. One-to-one interviews with members of the senior team support students in making the most appropriate choices. They appreciate the high levels of support and guidance they receive when deciding on routes to take at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Older students also receive very good support when they are thinking about their next step after the sixth form.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The school is as good as it is because of outstanding leadership. Teachers, governors and parents rightly praise the work and impact of the headteacher. He is strongly focused on improving standards and has very high expectations of staff and students. There is no complacency. The school uses very challenging targets as part of a deliberate policy to improve learning and results confirm that this works. Leadership has created a culture that constantly seeks ways in which things can be done better.

The headteacher is very well supported by a strong leadership team. They work well together, share common principles and provide very good leadership across the school. An extended leadership team of faculty heads is effective in monitoring, evaluating and promoting quality across their large teams. Self-evaluation is very thorough and effective. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating progress are exemplary. The school systematically collects the full range of evidence about subject performance and the pastoral curriculum. This contributes to good quality improvement plans and the impact of this process is seen in improved teaching and better progress by students.

The school knows its weaknesses well. Its collection and analysis of performance data and use of this to set targets for students is excellent and enables it to identify underperformance from year-to-year and put appropriate measures in place, for instance through its well targeted intervention programme. For example, it recognised that English performs less well than other core subjects. A wide range of actions has been put into place to improve standards; as a result, the provisional GCSE results improved substantially in 2008.

The governing body knows the school well and works closely with staff. It provides support and challenge. Governors are well qualified and their skills are matched effectively to key aspects of the school. However, governors are not sufficiently involved in ensuring that school policies and procedures are regularly updated. The impact of the specialist status of the school has been positive. It has led to better sharing of good practice and increased support for partner primary schools. Provision for the wider community is good and 30 groups regularly use the sports facilities.

Senior leaders have successfully created an orderly school where students behave exceptionally well and enjoy learning. This is an inclusive school which supports vulnerable students very well and helps them to make outstanding progress. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively. Recent improvements in standards, together with the constant emphasis on doing even better, confirm that the capacity for further improvement is also outstanding.

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

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	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	1
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	1	
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**

Inspection of Wickersley School and Sports College, Rotherham, S66 1JL

My colleagues and I very much enjoyed meeting you during the inspection on 26–27 November 2008. You were very welcoming and polite. We thought that your behaviour was outstanding; one of the team said that it was the best she had seen in a secondary school for some time.

Your feedback and the comments of your parents were very positive about the school. You said that you enjoy coming to school and you especially like the wide range of sporting and other activities available outside lessons. You work hard and respond especially well where lessons give you the chance to collaborate with others or develop independence.

We judged many aspects of your school to be outstanding. This does not happen very often in school inspections and all students and members of staff should be very proud of this achievement. The school has improved since the last inspection. Standards are well above average in Key Stages 3 and 4 and your achievement is excellent. The sixth form has also improved. However, standards and achievement are not quite as high there and we have suggested that this is something the school should try to improve.

You told us that you feel safe and that there is very little bullying. We agree. The school is quiet and orderly. You all get on well with one another. The school cares for you particularly and provides extra support for those students who need it. This helps them to do very well also.

Once again, thank you for being so friendly and helpful during our visit. I hope that the pantomime went well.