

Weald School, The

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126068
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	328452
Inspection date	11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White 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)	1466
Sixth form	257
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Parr
Headteacher	Peter Woodman
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Station Road Billingshurst RH14 9RY
Telephone number	01403 787200
Fax number	01403 787276

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the school's effectiveness in tackling underachievement and establishing a trend of rising achievement in all core subjects
- how well the curriculum meets the needs of students
- the impact of strategies to share good teaching practice and thereby eradicate unevenness in students' performance in some subjects.

Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher, the leadership team, members of staff including some middle managers and students and governors. Parts of lessons were observed; documents, including the school development plan, minutes of governors' meetings, records of monitoring and evaluation, external reports and parents' questionnaires, were examined. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Weald is a large, very settled rural comprehensive with specialist status in technology and sport. The vast majority of students are from White British backgrounds with less than 5% from minority ethnic grounds. Very few students speak English as an additional language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. A broadly average number of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Of these, a below average number have a statement of special educational needs.

Recently, there have been a number of changes within the senior leadership team. The headteacher took up his post in January 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This very good school is improving and has considerable strengths. The aspirations of leaders to attain the highest standards, as well as developing a supportive, inclusive community, are apparent throughout the work of the school. The restructured senior leadership team is working very well together; change has been seized as an opportunity to build on strengths and tackle some remaining weaknesses. Leaders and managers, including the governors, have a clear vision with the needs of students central to improvement planning. Staff morale is high. Leadership skills are being developed successfully at all levels. The impact of high expectations is seen in the good progress students make to reach above average standards at the end of all key stages. The school recognises that students' progress in mathematics has not kept pace with other core subjects. Robust strategies are in place to ensure this is remedied. Observation of mathematics lessons indicate students are making better progress and the school's assessment information shows it is on track to achieve its challenging targets in the subject. There are no underperforming groups within the school. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress as a result of well-targeted support.

Standards are rising in the specialist subjects of technology and sport. The good practice in these areas is shared and students benefit from the increased variety in provision. For example, music technology has been introduced in the sixth form and students' easy access to laptop computers enhances learning in a number of subject areas. The school is ambitious to build on this work and, appropriately, the use of new technologies to develop students' ability to learn independently, is one of the school's development priorities.

Students' personal development is excellent. Students are articulate and confident, value their education, and make the most of the very good opportunities they are offered. The excellent spiritual, moral and cultural development of students is given a high priority. The resulting strong ethos of tolerance and mutual respect is the foundation of students' good behaviour. Whilst some parents raised concerns about behaviour, the great majority agree it is good and a product of highly effective, personalised support for students. The warm and positive relationships throughout the school are an important factor in students' enjoyment of learning and their above average attendance. The school plays an active role at the heart of the local community and students demonstrate they are responsible citizens through the contribution they make. For example, Year 8 students help to organise and run a senior citizens event. Students also develop global awareness through clubs such as 'Amnesty' and 'Mini-United Nations', as well as the school's links with France.

The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection with more good and outstanding practice. Regular lesson observations, coaching and mentoring, challenge and support staff as they develop their skills. The good opportunities for professional development and sharing best practice link to the school development plan and are tailored to the needs of individual staff. The school is rightly intent on improving the small proportion of satisfactory teaching to good or better to accelerate students' progress further.

The increasingly creative curriculum is responsive to the needs of students. The many after-school activities contribute well to students' personal development and help maintain a rich mixture of experiences for students. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 has been reduced to two years to give scope for greater breadth and flexibility in an extended Key Stage 4. It is too

early to see the impact of this development but students are very engaged with their learning. Many continue their studies in the sixth form and go on to further and higher education.

Parents are right to praise the excellent care, guidance and support for students. Safeguarding procedures are robust. The school has made appropriate checks on all adults who work with the students and ensures that its single central record of such checks is updated at the recommended intervals. Students of all ages feel safe and believe any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. They are confident there is always someone to go to if they have a problem, feel valued as individuals and listened to. Excellent one-to-one guidance at key transition points helps students to make the right choices and sustain their enjoyment of learning. One parent commented, 'I had sleepless nights about my son moving to secondary school without his peer group but, thanks to The Weald, it has been an engaging and enriching process, beyond any of my expectations and my son is flourishing.' The school is outward looking. It makes a good contribution to community cohesion through strong partnerships with community groups, youth and social services, other local schools and the Children's and Family Centre.

Overall, leadership and management are good and strengthening. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's work and priorities. They are influential in shaping its strategic direction and highly effective in supporting and challenging senior leaders to maintain the momentum of improvement. Self-evaluation is accurate with thorough analysis of performance data. Middle leaders are becoming more expert in evaluating how well their teams promote students' learning and well-being. The headteacher gives strong direction to the work of the school. He has quickly established an effective senior team and this, combined with the refocusing of leadership at all levels on raising students' achievement, ensures excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Good quality teaching, excellent support, and extended curriculum opportunities mean that a high proportion of students in Year 11 choose to continue into the sixth form. They are joined each year by students from other schools, who report that they are supported very well and settle in quickly. Students in the sixth form make good progress and achieve results in a range of courses that are above the national average.

The care, guidance and support students receive are outstanding. Many students note with appreciation the high quality of academic support and feedback from their teachers. They describe an atmosphere of constant encouragement and belief in their ability to do well. Tutors play an important role in maintaining contact with parents and ensuring students are on track to realise their potential. Guidance

provided for future careers or education beyond the sixth form is personalised and well informed.

Sixth formers are excellent role models and support younger students through the mentoring and buddying programmes. They also take the lead in school and community projects, for example in undertaking voluntary work through Youth Outset and supporting the development of children's reading in the local primary school. Their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, these responsibilities is testament to their excellent personal development. The sixth form is well led and managed. Effective analysis of performance data and cohesive planning within the senior management team are resulting in improving provision and outcomes for students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards further, particularly in mathematics, by improving the small proportion of satisfactory teaching to good or better through the school's coaching and mentoring systems.
- Use new technologies to develop students' ability to learn independently.

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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?	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	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	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	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
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?	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?	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	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	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**

12 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Weald School, Billingshurst RH14 9RY

Thank you for your warm and courteous welcome when we inspected your school recently. We were delighted to see that you enjoy school and agree with your comments and the views of your parents that yours is a good and improving school with some outstanding aspects. You are making good progress to reach high standards. You develop very good working relationships with school staff and make a positive contribution to school life and the local community. Staff know you really well and take excellent care of you. They make sure your personal development is excellent so that you mature into well rounded and responsible adults able to make the most of life's opportunities. The good curriculum gives you a wide choice of subjects that meet your needs. In addition, the many after-school activities give you a rich mixture of experiences.

Your school is well led. Leaders know its strengths and areas for development in detail. Everyone is working hard to make sure you all have the best education possible and achieve even higher standards. We have asked your headteacher, senior leaders and governors to:

- raise standards further, particularly in mathematics by improving the small proportion of satisfactory teaching to good or better through the school's coaching and mentoring systems
- use new technologies to develop your learning skills.

There are many exciting opportunities for you at The Weald School. I am sure that that you will continue to make the most of them.

I wish you every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Jacqueline White

Her Majesty's Inspector