

Walton High

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131396
Local Authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	328585
Inspection dates	24–25 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Emma Ing HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1461
Sixth form	388
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Marilyn Moffat
Headteacher	Ms Michelle Currie
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2005
School address	Fyfield Barrow Walnut Tree Milton Keynes MK7 7WH
Telephone number	01908 677954
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Age group	11–19
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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

The school opened in 1999 and has grown rapidly. It is now considerably bigger than most comprehensive schools and has a large sixth form. It gained specialist status in Business and Enterprise in 2002 and was subsequently identified as a high performing specialist school. It became a hub for the Schools' Enterprise Education Network in 2006 and now promotes enterprise education across a wide area. The school is a lead school in a Leading Edge Partnership and through this initiative is working with local schools to raise attainment in mathematics. It is also a training school for teachers.

The school serves an area of relative affluence; a lower proportion than usual of students is entitled to free school meals. Many ethnic groups are represented in the school in small numbers, but around 80% of the student population are White British whilst about 6% are Black or Black British. The proportion of learners with special educational needs is below average, but there are some with different learning difficulties and also with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This school continues to deliver an outstanding education for its students. Provision in the sixth form has improved significantly since the last inspection and this is now outstanding. Key to the success of the school is the unswerving commitment of the principal and the senior leadership team to the right of every student to have their lives enhanced and enriched through education. The school maintains outstanding links with the community and inculcates in students an excellent awareness of the needs of others: locally, nationally and globally. As a result, the school prepares students exceptionally well for their future lives. Students have high regard for the opportunities that they are given. They feel that their curriculum provides them with exciting opportunities and that they are encouraged to develop good business and enterprise skills. They are proud of the school, courteous to visitors and extremely well behaved in lessons. One parent commented that 'You only have to see the pupils arriving early, enthusiastically, and smart to feel the 'buzz' at Walton High'. This describes well the positive ethos that pervades the school. Virtually all students really enjoy school and nowhere is this more evident than in lessons and short courses.

Teaching is consistently good and this, coupled with students' motivation and an outstanding curriculum has ensured that students are now making excellent progress and reaching exceptionally high standards. However whilst virtually no students make very poor progress, very few individuals make exceptional progress. In part, this is because not all teaching really stretches all students and not all marking gives feedback that specifies what the student needs to do to make further improvements in their work.

The curriculum contributes very strongly to students' enjoyment of school. The advanced learning days and short courses are carefully planned for and well taught and enable all students to develop a range of skills and interests. The Business and Enterprise specialism has enabled a large proportion of students to undertake business and enterprise enrichment activities and many gain good qualifications in these curriculum areas. A wide range of vocational courses is now available and students who take these are very successful.

The school is very good at ensuring that all students are able to do well. Parents comment on the outstanding support given to those who have particular needs either in the short or longer term. The pastoral team identifies issues early and intervenes appropriately. Students are guided onto appropriate courses and are given excellent support to enable them to achieve extremely well.

Senior leaders, including governors, are ambitious for the school and for the students within the school. They set high standards but through careful line management ensure that staff are empowered to reach them. In consequence, leaders at all levels are extremely effective. The school uses challenging targets year on year to secure improvement, and where these are not met, is proactive in reviewing what happened and ensuring that obstacles are overcome. Through the improvements made in relation to the sixth form, the 14–19 curriculum, the communication with parents and more recently to the delivery of mathematics, the school demonstrates outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

There has been great improvement in the sixth form since the last inspection. It now provides an outstanding education to a wide range of students. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is below the national average. However the school's tracking data confirms that they make outstanding progress in their studies and in line to achieve standards that are significantly higher than average.

The sixth form curriculum and the flexibility within it to enable students to take lower level courses and progress as appropriate to their needs, is outstanding. There are a range of vocational and applied courses on offer alongside more traditional A level subjects. Staff guide students extremely well in their choice of courses and make sure that they are well supported throughout to ensure that they are able to meet the challenging targets that are set for them. Students are given individual tutorials and parent consultation evenings are held.

Teaching is consistently good in the sixth form. Teachers' subject knowledge is very strong and they are able to communicate their enthusiasm for the subject well. Teachers however sometimes miss opportunities to explain to students exactly what level of answer is required to meet each grade and to challenge them to try to achieve it.

Students are pleased to be in the sixth form at this school and enjoy their lessons, particularly those that include group work and discussion. They feel that the school enables them to develop leadership and decision-making skills and gives them wide-ranging experiences. They are articulate and positive young people. They comment that they would like to take even more responsibility within the whole school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of excellent teaching by making sure that all lessons provide challenge for students at every level and that all teachers indicate what it is that students have to do to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students are currently making outstanding progress from Key Stage 2–4. The standards achieved are excellent. The school's tracking data indicates that an exceptionally high proportion of the Year 11 is securely on track to achieve five higher-level grades, including mathematics and English, at GCSE this summer. As their prior attainment was only just above average this represents outstanding progress.

Standards have been generally high at GCSE for some time, but, because of difficulties that the school experienced over the last two years in the delivery of mathematics, results in this subject have slipped. Determined and creative leadership at all levels has rectified this and the subject is now delivered very strongly with some excellent teaching.

Virtually no students significantly under-perform at this school. Students with learning difficulties make outstanding progress as do those who are vulnerable. There is no variation between the progress made of students from different ethnic backgrounds. Whilst the progress of students is consistently good and very good, and therefore outstanding overall, few individual students make exceptional progress.

The standards achieved in 2007 at Key Stage 3 were above average and they have improved in mathematics and science this year. Progress in this key stage was broadly average in 2007. The school's tracking data indicates progress is now good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Relationships throughout the school are extremely positive. Students mix well across potential barriers such as age, gender and ethnicity. Relationships are respectful and supportive both amongst students and between students and staff. Students are aware of the feelings of others and appreciate deeper meanings in art and philosophy. They have an outstanding understanding of right and wrong which they can articulate and is evident in the way they behave. Their behaviour in lessons is outstanding and contributes to the excellent progress that they make. They are aware of safety issues. Students take pride in their school and take care of the buildings. They are proud of their achievements and those of their peers and particularly of the school productions.

Students are very conscious of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle and the vast majority participate in some of the wide-ranging sporting opportunities available to them. They are active both in the school community as sport leaders, peer mentors, performers and team members and in the community beyond school. They welcome responsibility and discharge their responsibilities, such as organising special days, well. Many students are involved in committees concerned with the running of the school, but school council has been in abeyance recently and is not well recognised as a vehicle for student voice.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Lessons are consistently good across the school. Teachers know their subjects well and make learning fun. Some teaching is extremely imaginative and creative. Students enjoy and respond well to opportunities to work in groups, independently and to engage in paired work, role-play and decision making activities. The support given to individuals with special needs in lessons is well planned and extremely well delivered. In many lessons however, questioning and learning activities do not maximise the challenge to students.

All students know what their targets are. In some lessons students are guided to evaluate their work themselves or in pairs, this however is not well established throughout the school, and teachers miss opportunities to explain, either orally or in their marking, what level a piece of work is, and what students would need to do to make it even better.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

It is part of the ethos of the school that learning is fun and should not be confined to basics. For two sessions a week students are given a range of options, and a degree of choice to enable them to participate in a hugely rich and varied curriculum such as jewellery making, craft, golf, skiing, drama, 'boxercise', bread making, gifted and talented study session and a variety of enterprise activities. These sessions are highly valued by students reflecting the fact that

teachers make sure that they are tightly planned and delivered in stimulating ways. They are very effective at helping students develop important skills and prepare them well for the future.

The school has made excellent progress in developing a flexible curriculum at Key Stage 4 that meets the needs of all students. Changes to the curriculum were subject to consultation with parents and were devised to enable students to meet the needs of the local labour market. The school now offers a good range of academic and vocational courses. The business and enterprise specialism contributes significant strengths to the curriculum with high proportions of students gaining good qualifications in business related courses and information and communication technology. They further develop their understanding through enrichment activities. The school provides only limited work-related learning and courses suitable for students for whom academic work is very difficult. However, because staff support students well, all students are able to achieve qualifications within the current curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school goes out of its way to ensure that all students have opportunities to achieve well and participate fully in the life of the school. The school provides exceptionally well for the personal development and well-being of students. All safety procedures are fully in place. Highly effective measures are in place to maintain and improve the high levels of attendance. Students speak highly of their careers guidance and are well supported in making choices about courses.

There are excellent systems in place to ensure that students experiencing difficulties are identified and can access appropriate support from a wide range of sources. A thorough pastoral system identifies issues and intervenes early to ensure that behaviour is excellent. As a result the number of times that students are excluded from school has fallen. The school tracks the academic progress of students carefully, and this data is carefully analysed and used by teachers, subject leaders, and leading teachers to ensure that students are given the support they need to meet their targets. Senior leaders rightly acknowledge that the use of data could be further refined for ease of use and to ensure clearer and closer match of teaching to learners' needs.

A small minority of parents who returned Ofsted questionnaires expressed concern about the school's communication with them. The school had been aware of such concerns, and the investigation made by inspectors showed that, whilst there is always more that could be done, this aspect of the school's work is very good. The school gives parents a great deal of information about their expectations of the students, about homework, course dates and about the progress students make both on the website, in hard copy and throughout the year in person. The Principal, Vice Principals are available on Monday, and tutors on Friday, afternoons for 'surgeries', and the school has a clear policy on staff response to parental communications the implementation of which they closely monitor.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The Principal provides strong, focussed and effective leadership. Together with her senior leadership team, she has created a school with an extremely positive ethos. The school knows itself and everyone shares a clear value system and commitment to excellence. Leaders know their school well, they plan carefully and innovatively in order to achieve improvements and

work collaboratively with partners to further shared goals. For example, the school has recognised that recruiting mathematics teachers is difficult locally and is working with other schools to develop strong teachers and raise standards in this subject. Governors hold the school to account exceptionally well, carefully monitoring the progress made towards targets. They are supportive of the school, but not blind to areas that could be improved, nor shy to challenge constructively.

Middle leaders lead subject areas extremely well. They meet frequently with their line managers and use this time to review progress against targets and identify next steps. In this manner, senior leaders both support and challenge all staff to achieve the school's goals.

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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?	1	1
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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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?	1	1
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	1
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?	1	
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	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**

08 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Walton High, Milton Keynes, MK7 7WH

My team found it a great pleasure spending two days in your school and particularly enjoyed watching you at work and talking to you. I would like to thank all of you for sharing your views with us and for your welcome and your courtesy. We were very impressed by your positive attitudes to learning and by your enjoyment of school.

You will be pleased to hear that we agreed with those of you that told us that your school is excellent. Because the provision offered is excellent overall, and because you enjoy school and are prepared to work hard in lessons, you make outstanding progress at this school right through to the end of the sixth form.

Like you, we judge the curriculum and particularly the short courses to be outstanding, offering you interesting ways of further developing your skills and understanding. We agree with those of your parents that felt that the care and support that you receive is excellent. A few of your parents were concerned that it is hard to communicate with staff at the school, but we found that the school works hard to engage parents, to share information about learning and the progress that children make and to be available.

The teaching at your school is consistently good. It will be even better when teachers share with you exactly what it is you have to do to reach your targets and also make sure that all of you are challenged and stretched in lessons.

Your school does so well because the Principal together with the Vice Principals and governors have a clear vision of excellence for the school and are determined and innovative in pursuing this vision.

I look forward to following your achievements and those of your school in the future.

Yours sincerely

Emma Ing

Her Majesty's Inspector