

Washington School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108865
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	337169
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	945
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Dorothy Butler
Headteacher	Mr Michael O'Brien
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors, one of whom was present for the first morning only to support the evaluation of the school's safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors saw 31 lessons and 35 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students, governors, senior leaders, staff, a local authority representative and a group of partners who support the school in its work with students. They observed the school's work, and looked in detail at samples of students' books, safeguarding and other school policies, school improvement plans and assessment information on the current attainment and progress of students across the school. Questionnaires from 280 parents and carers as well as 60 staff were analysed, and a sample of students' questionnaires was considered.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of teaching on students' progress in lessons
- the use of assessment to improve outcomes for all groups
- the impact of leadership and management, including the work of middle leaders and governors, on outcomes for students
- the impact of the school's provision on students' health, enjoyment, achievement, contribution to school and economic well-being.

Information about the school

Washington is an average-sized newly-built secondary school which opened in September 2009. An above average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students from minority ethnic communities is well below that found nationally whilst the proportion of students deemed to have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. This includes 20 students who attend the Local Authority's specialist resourced provision. These students have a separate base but work with their peers in lessons and are fully included in the life of the school. An average proportion of students have a statement of special educational needs. The school was redesignated as a specialist technology college for the third time in 2007 and holds nationally recognised awards such as Investors in People and the Healthy Schools Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Significant improvement is required in relation to students' attainment and rates of progress, the use of assessment to support learning and in the consistency and quality of teaching. The pace of improvement has been inconsistent across the school and leaders have yet to deal fully with some of the issues identified at the time of the last inspection. This is partly due to a history of wide-scale staff absence which has resulted in significant periods of disruption to some students' learning. The long-drawn-out procedures to develop and move into the new school diverted leaders' focus from securing high-quality teaching and learning. Leaders are now back on track, although their capacity to drive and embed improvement is inadequate because some staff have yet to accept full responsibility for their role in the school's improvement or engage with a purposeful vision for change.

Nevertheless, there has been some improvement. For example, although still below average, the proportion of students attaining at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C increased in 2009 following a significant dip in 2008, and students currently in Year 11 are making broadly expected progress. Students who are targeted for specific support and care because of their special educational needs and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

During the inspection, teaching observed ranged from inspirational to inadequate, with much that was satisfactory. However, teaching is inadequate overall because it is not consistently good enough to make sure that students catch up the ground lost in previous years or to ensure that they all make the best possible progress in lessons. The school has developed a good assessment system that tracks students' progress regularly and enables challenging individual targets to be set. All students have targets and know what they are. Not all teachers are using this information to plan lessons that take account of students' different starting points, particularly those of higher-ability students. Marking has improved since the last inspection and, when used well, is informative and helps students understand how well they are doing and what to do next. However, the school's policy is inconsistently applied. A satisfactory curriculum has been enhanced to provide a wider range of options for older students and this is ensuring that a high proportion goes on to further education, training or employment after leaving school. Until recently, the school's specialism of technology was weak and

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made no discernible contribution to the wider work of the school. Actions taken by leaders have improved both the provision and its impact satisfactorily.

Behaviour is good in many lessons and as students move around the school. Students are friendly, polite and helpful. However, behaviour is judged as satisfactory overall because in the inadequate lessons the low-level disruptive behaviour of a small number of students is stopping other students from learning. Some teachers are not adhering to the school's behaviour-management policy and this is a cause of concern to some students in terms of consistency and fairness. The school is aware that the number of students excluded for fixed periods has increased. Leaders are taking action to tackle this through more effective liaison between pastoral and curriculum leaders and close partnership working with other agencies to support students' emotional well-being better. Despite efforts made, attendance rates have declined since the last inspection and are low, although recent actions are beginning to turn the tide.

The recent cycle of meetings between senior leaders, curriculum leaders and programme managers is beginning to hold middle managers to account more effectively for the areas they lead and also ensuring better liaison across departments. Some middle managers speak positively about their developing roles but they do not ensure that all staff are using assessment information about students' progress to inform lessons. Once settled in the new school, the headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body conducted a detailed audit of the school's work and, as a result, have an accurate view of the current strengths and weaknesses. Self-evaluation is insightful and honest. Clear, focused action plans have been put in place to secure further improvement. For example, as part of the strategy to improve teaching, a coaching system has been developed so staff can learn from the best. However, leaders are aware that there is much to do and recent improvements are fragile. Given the weaknesses identified above, the school recognises that it is not providing value for money and that its capacity for sustained improvement is currently inadequate.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress by:
 - – eradicating inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and ensuring that teachers always have high expectations of students
 - – consistently using assessment and information about students' prior learning to plan work that meets the learning needs of all, particularly the most-able
 - – ensuring that lessons provide interesting, varied tasks that challenge all students
 - – sharing the good practice clearly evident in school
 - – ensuring that the behaviour-management policy is consistently and fairly applied so boundaries and expectations of students and staff are clear.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - – holding middle managers more fully to account for the effective use of assessment information in their areas of responsibility
 - – increasing middle managers' role in monitoring the impact of teaching by observing lessons and by reviewing planning and its impact on students' progress

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- – reducing staff absence to a minimum
- – developing additional strategies to increase students' attendance rates and to reduce the number of days lost to fixed-period exclusions.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**4**

Students are making generally satisfactory progress in lessons because of senior leaders' recent focus on improving provision. In lessons which excite, challenge and interest them, such as German and physical education, students make good and occasionally outstanding progress. The school's most recent assessment information also shows that students are making better gains in their learning, although there is some variation in the rate of progress of particular groups, such as higher-ability students. However, there is too much variation within departments and across year groups; where teaching is inadequate, students' progress is also invariably inadequate. High absence and fixed-period exclusion rates are also having a detrimental impact on the attainment and progress of some students.

Just over half of the students who completed the inspection questionnaire reported that they enjoy school, although all say how much better the new school is. Students take good care of the building. They feel safe in the calm and open spaces. They understand how to keep safe and are satisfactorily taught about risks to their safety. However, a small minority of students expressed concerns about the impact of poor behaviour in some lessons. While they indicate that some bullying takes place, they are confident that adults such as heads of year and learning mentors will quickly take action once they are informed of incidents. Students have a clear understanding of how to stay fit, well and eat healthily, although not all apply this when making choices. For example, nearly all students taking school meals choose healthy options but a significant number eat out of school where choice is less healthy. Physical education is popular, as are the variety of sporting activities available. There are many ways in which students can contribute to the work of the school and local community and over a third often do so. All students helped to make important decisions about the design of the school and were all excellent ambassadors when the school was opened by the Queen. Senior leaders are aware that the school council's contribution to the work of the school has been limited and are taking action to improve this.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The variations in students' progress within year groups and between subjects are the result of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the consequential impact on learning. In the inadequate and the barely satisfactory lessons teaching fails to promote students' learning or enjoyment successfully enough. In better lessons routines are well established and relationships between adults and students are harmonious and productive; students behave well, are keen to learn and contribute enthusiastically. Teachers' good subject knowledge and use of questioning probes what students know so they can move learning on at a brisk pace. Appropriate activities are linked to students' abilities, yet also provide the extra challenge needed. However, too many lessons are dominated by teachers with insufficient opportunities for students to develop their independence, work collaboratively or formulate and discuss their own ideas. In such lessons, students become passive and do not always involve themselves fully in their learning.

A satisfactory curriculum has been enriched and more effectively matched to students' needs, aspirations and interests in Key Stage 4, especially for lower-ability students. These students particularly appreciate the off-site provision which is having a discernible impact on their enjoyment and achievements. Senior leaders are aware that the Key Stage 3 curriculum is not as strong. They have conducted a review and consulted students to create a more diverse curriculum from September.

The pastoral system has been redesigned to guarantee effective care, guidance and support to students. Year managers and learning mentors are well regarded and students know they can turn to them in times of need for support. The school's

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approaches to help students settle into school, move through the school, choose options and then move into the world of further education, employment or training are valued by parents and carers. Students in Year 7 appreciate the way the school helps them to settle in successfully.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and the governing body, in partnership with students and staff, have set a strong inclusive vision for the school encapsulated in 'welcome, safe, belong, engage, achieve', in order to raise aspirations and achievement. The school building is welcoming and safe and students express a strong sense of belonging to the school. The headteacher and school leaders know, to improve outcomes for all students, all students and staff need to engage with the aims of the school. A wide range of actions has recently been developed to move the school forward but leaders are aware that there is much to do and it is far too soon to see the full impact of these. For example, senior leaders are beginning to see the impact of systems to improve teaching, such as unannounced observations of lessons and the coaching model for teachers. The recently developed assessment system has enabled better identification of underperformance in Year 11 and targeted interventions are helping to improve outcomes for this group but leaders know that this is not happening in all year groups and are aware of the inconsistent use of assessment across the school.

Great efforts have been made to ensure that the large school site and grounds are secure, and to promote students' welfare, health and safety. Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements. Following the school's review, governance arrangements have been strengthened. The impact has been to provide robust challenge and a firm commitment to tackle the weaknesses in provision. The Governing Body has improved the way that it challenges leaders and is fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the school's work; consequently, it has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas of weakness. The appointment of students to the governing body provides a good way of making sure that governors keep an eye on students' views and act upon them. However, governors have not provided enough challenge to ensure that leaders tackled the decline in standards quickly enough following the last inspection, therefore their effectiveness is judged inadequate overall.

The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily. Students have a good

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understanding of their local and regional community. Leaders are aware that more needs to be done to ensure that students have a better understanding of the diversity of communities across the United Kingdom and internationally and plans are in place to address this. The school works hard to promote equality, tackle disadvantage and include all students in the life of the school. This is evident where the school has targeted its actions: assessment information indicates students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are making satisfactory progress. Leaders are proactive in ensuring that the students whose circumstances make them most vulnerable have roles of responsibility. However, because of the impact of the poor behaviour in inadequate lessons, where some students' progress is disadvantaged, the school's effectiveness in promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination is no better than satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Views of parents and carers

Just over a quarter of parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire. They were supportive of the school, particularly in terms of how well the school keeps their children safe and encourages them to have a healthy lifestyle. They also value the way the school prepares their children for the future and keeps them informed about their children's progress. Around 10% made additional comments. Of the negative comments received, the main concerns were the quality of some teaching and the number of supply teachers, bullying and behaviour. The inspection report makes comment on all of these issues.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Washington School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 280 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1020 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	16	185	66	42	15	6	2
The school keeps my child safe	53	19	197	70	22	8	6	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	78	28	170	61	29	10	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	56	20	185	66	31	11	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	52	19	179	64	37	13	5	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	43	15	176	63	48	17	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	40	14	199	71	30	11	1	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	56	20	189	68	18	6	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	50	18	189	68	27	10	4	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	58	21	150	54	46	16	18	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	39	14	176	63	37	13	11	4
The school is led and managed effectively	55	20	182	65	26	9	5	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	68	24	166	59	27	10	8	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Washington School, Washington, NE37 2AA

Thank you for making me and the team so welcome when we visited your school. I would particularly like to thank those of you who took time to talk to us. We were glad to hear that you like your new school. A number of you and your parents and carers reported in the inspection questionnaires that behaviour is sometimes an issue. We found behaviour to be good in many classes and as you moved around the open spaces indoors and outside. However, in lessons where teaching is inadequate behaviour is not good and some of you have your learning disrupted as a result; so we have judged behaviour to be satisfactory overall. The curriculum is satisfactory and getting better, particularly at Key Stage 4, and you make an effective contribution to the school and local community through your many roles and responsibilities. You were particularly good ambassadors for the school when the Queen came to open it.

There are some important weaknesses which have led us to judge the school as requiring 'special measures' and we have asked the headteacher and governors to tackle them. These include issues about behaviour. The senior leadership team is working hard to improve the school but until recently the pace has been slow. This is partly because of the time taken to build the school and because there have been too many disruptions to your lessons due to staff absences. Although improving, the progress you make in lessons is inconsistent. The quality of teaching is improving. While some is inadequate, some is good and even outstanding but it is not consistently good enough to make sure that you all make the best possible progress in lessons. Additionally, not all teachers are using the information they have about your progress to make sure that lessons match all your needs. Managers are not always checking that this information is in teachers' planning. Too many of you are absent and an increasing number of you are excluded for short periods. This too has had a detrimental impact on your learning.

On behalf of the team I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector

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