

Wymondham High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121171
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	339887
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Stephen Abbott 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1550
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	320
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Hadcroft
Headteacher	Mrs Victoria Musgrave
Date of previous school inspection	9 January 2007
School address	Folly Road Wymondham Norfolk
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 44 lessons and held meetings with senior and middle leaders, groups of staff and students, governors and a representative of the local authority. They observed the school's work and looked at the school improvement plan, subject development plans, policy documents, and the school's monitoring and safeguarding records. Questionnaires were completed by 285 parents and carers, 173 students and 88 members of staff. At the time of the inspection, Year 10 students were completing work experience and Year 11 students were engaged in mock examinations. Therefore it was only possible to observe lessons in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form.

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

- the quality of senior leadership, including the leadership and management of teaching and learning
- the impact of school action to reverse the downward trend in achievement
- how well the curriculum meets the needs of all students.
- the quality of care, guidance and support.
- the range of qualifications offered in sixth form.

Information about the school

Wymondham High School is a large specialist school for the arts that has recently added a second specialism in science with gifted and talented provision. At present, the school has twelve temporary classrooms. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average.

The great majority of pupils are of White British origin, with small numbers from various other ethnic groups. Very few students are at an early stage of learning English. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below average for the size of the school.

The school holds the Artsmark Silver Award. The headteacher was appointed in September 2008.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The effectiveness of Wymondham High School is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. Attainment at age 16 is above average but this represents only satisfactory progress being made by students in Key Stages 3 and 4 because standards are above average when students join in Year 7. Students' learning and progress are consistent with the standards of teaching, which are satisfactory in the main school but good in the sixth form. Although the school is judged less effective than it was in the last inspection, it is currently improving under the very good leadership of the headteacher, which is well supported by the majority of senior and middle leaders.

In the last few years, Wymondham High School has had four different headteachers. This turbulence coincided with a period of decline which is evident in the last two sets of GCSE results. Although attainment remained above average, students did not make as much progress as expected. When the present headteacher was appointed, she therefore took over a school at a low ebb. Her ambition for Wymondham High School to become a centre of outstanding practice is shared by the great majority of staff.

The school has worked with partners to enhance the curriculum and has secured a second specialist area in science. Most of the criticisms levelled in the last report have been addressed and the curriculum is now good. For example, the school's analysis of 2008 results identified that too many students with below average prior attainment had not progressed as well as other groups. In response, the school has developed a special curriculum pathway for these students which gives them more time to consolidate learning by cutting out one option. The school can justify its focus on academic subjects in the sixth form because there is a good range of Level 2 provision locally that is well used by students who leave at age 16.

A greater emphasis on rewards has re-established students' pride in their school and in their own achievement. Students' personal development is good and their contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding. For example, students contribute to science work with primary schools; take part in extra-curricular activities reflecting the school's specialist subjects of art, drama and music; engage in community service; and support younger students through the mixed-age tutor groups. Last year, the school's Green Team won a Schools Sustainability Project regional award.

The previous system of lesson observations allowed teachers to choose which of their lessons would be observed and gave them two weeks' notice of observation. Under this system, most lessons were judged as good. A new system, where senior leaders drop into lessons at short notice has made it clear that the majority of teaching is satisfactory. However, there are enough examples of good and outstanding practice to

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support professional development. Good teaching in the sixth form leads to good progress and high attainment.

The headteacher has brought a new realism to the school's self-evaluation and a greater urgency to its improvement planning. A core team of senior leaders has been established to tackle the most urgent areas for improvement, but there is still some inconsistency in the senior leadership group. This was commented upon by several members of staff in their questionnaire returns. Middle management has been strengthened through a combination of new appointments and greater accountability, and is now mostly good. However, there is still some inconsistency across subjects, with a few departments setting targets that are too comfortable.

Currently, senior leaders use a narrow range of performance indicators to measure improvement. Historically, their main focus has been on the proportion of students gaining at least five A* to C passes at GCSE including mathematics and English. As a result, the students benefiting most from targeted support have been those on the C/D borderline. However, the proportion of students gaining five A* to G passes has declined, and some of the most able students are not getting enough A* and A grades. More recently support has been broadened to target specifically identified groups within the school.

Senior leaders have made satisfactory progress in making lessons more effective. For example, in nearly all cases, teachers explain the learning objectives and intended outcomes of their lessons. However, not all have got into the habit of checking at the end of each lesson that the objectives have been met. Similarly, most lesson plans now identify groups of students, such as those with special educational needs and the most able, but they do not always indicate how the lesson will be adapted to meet their needs. The school has provided professional development on the use of assessment, but assessment remains inconsistent in Key Stage 3.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good overall, but support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is only satisfactory. There are three main reasons: accountability for the quality of support and the monitoring of students' progress is not solely vested with a senior leader; teachers do not always make effective use of the teaching assistants in their classrooms; and teaching assistants do not keep day to day records on the progress of the students they are supporting.

In summary, this well led school now has a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Many changes for the better have been made over the past year and, although some have had too little time to show through in terms of higher standards, the school has already succeeded in arresting the decline in students' progress. These developments demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress made by students in Key Stages 3 and 4 by;
 - ensuring that students are set suitably ambitious targets in all subjects

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- using a wider range of performance indicators to hold subject leaders to account, not just the proportion of A* to C grades at GCSE
- identifying students in all year groups who are not on target for good progress and taking appropriate action to support them.
- Improve the quality of teaching and assessment by;
 - expanding the programme of identifying and sharing the techniques used by the most effective teachers
 - ensuring that each lesson meets the full range of needs of students in the class
 - ensuring that teaching assistants have a clearer role in lessons and keep detailed records on the progress of the students they are supporting.
- Strengthen the accountability of school leaders by;
 - clarifying the leadership of special educational needs support, including the arrangements for monitoring students' progress
 - reviewing the leadership of the school to ensure all senior leaders provide appropriate challenge and maintain a relentless focus on improvement.
- In each case, the school should be able to demonstrate improvement within twelve months.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

During the inspection, Key Stage 3 students made good progress in just under half of the lessons observed. Students were cooperative and keen to learn but their progress in lessons reflected the quality of teaching they received. In the best cases, students were challenged to think for themselves and this increased their understanding and pace of learning. For example, after one outstanding geography lesson on models of urban development, the teacher explained, 'I didn't want just to tell them, because I knew they could work it out for themselves.' More often, learning and progress were only satisfactory because the most able were insufficiently stretched and the lessons were not well enough adapted for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who made satisfactory progress.

The two most recent sets of GCSE results show that students' progress in Key Stage 4 has not been as good as that of similar students across the country. The gap is equivalent to each student scoring a grade lower than expected in two of their subjects. In 2008, the GCSE results showed that two small groups of students achieved less well than others, these being students receiving free school meals and students with special educational needs in the 'school action plus' group. However, these two groups made similar progress to other students in 2009.

Although students' attainment remains above average, standards have fallen since the last inspection. There is some variation among different subjects, with mathematics,

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history and science being particularly strong. Although a significant proportion of students were ungraded in information and communication technology (ICT) examinations last year, this was due to poor guidance on completing coursework rather than low standards.

Students' above average attendance and good behaviour demonstrates their enjoyment of school. They feel safe in school and learn about personal safety. Many students are involved in extra-curricular sports in addition to their regular two hours of physical education each week. Most live healthy lifestyles and appreciate the healthy food options provided by the school. They promote the values of the school as a community extremely well. For example, the various school councils involve a range of different students in making suggestions to improve the school.

Students develop skills and attitudes that will serve them well in the workplace. They are polite and well presented, punctual to lessons and they work effectively together. They have well developed skills in numeracy, literacy and the use of ICT and they complete useful journals that help them get the best out of their work experience.

Lessons in history, geography, specialist arts subjects and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) and religious education contribute well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These subjects help students develop a good understanding of moral issues and to learn about cultures around the world. However, opportunities for reflection are occasionally missed and students are not all well informed about the diversity of cultures in Britain.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

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

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	
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2 2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The best lessons provide a fertile learning environment in which students are fully engaged and challenged by a range of teaching strategies and resources. Classroom relationships are very positive. Teachers use questioning well to assess students' understanding and are therefore well placed to judge the best way of moving learning forward. They make sure that their students have clear targets, know how well they are doing and understand how to improve. The majority of teaching is satisfactory because the teachers are more focused on what they will get students to do, rather than on what they want students to learn. As a result, they do not make good use of assessment to guide their teaching and the pace of learning is slower. Teachers make adequate use of teaching assistants but do not often give them specific instructions on how to support learning.

Students now have a good range of vocational options, including diplomas and young apprenticeships that are provided in partnership with other local schools, colleges and work-based learning providers. There are also bespoke arrangements to meet the particular needs of individual students. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities and a system of late buses to allow all students to participate. The school makes good use of educational visits and visiting speakers to enrich the curriculum. For example, during the inspection some students visited the battlefields of the Great War and a visitor talked to sixth formers about studying at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Occasionally, the timetable is suspended for a day to focus on a cross-curricular theme such as enterprise.

The house-based mixed-age tutoring system is well liked by students because of the good influence of older students on the younger ones. There are excellent transition arrangements for students joining in Year 7, including a summer school for potentially vulnerable students. Students receive very good guidance on their GCSE and post-16 options, with all Year 9 and Year 11 students receiving individual interviews from senior leaders. The effectiveness of arrangements for promoting good attendance and behaviour is evident in the low levels of persistent absence and exclusion. Students who have emotional, social or family issues have access to a professional counsellor and a family support officer who provide good support, including liaison with other care agencies. Form tutors gather data on their tutees three times a year to create an academic profile to send to parents. Students' current level of work and their attitudes to learning are reported alongside their academic targets. This information is used to identify students who need extra support and its impact on students' progress is currently satisfactory. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are

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monitored through the same system, but this does not provide enough detail to support incisive reviews of their individual education plans.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Since her appointment, the headteacher has shown a strong commitment to drive improvement. One middle leader commented, 'After a few years when the school did not move forward, the vision is now much clearer under the new leadership.' Another described the head as 'driving the school forward' and 'inspirational'. With the support of the governing body, a core of senior leaders and most middle managers, she has provided a new sense of direction which means that ambition is now well embedded.

The senior leadership team has been restructured on a temporary basis ahead of a full review, to reduce the extent of overlaps in responsibilities. This has helped to clarify lines of accountability, but some inconsistencies remain. The local authority has enhanced the team's capacity via a secondment at deputy headteacher level. This has enabled the school to develop further its procedures for tracking students and evaluating its effectiveness. The new chair of governors has established an independent means of gathering information about the school's effectiveness and this helps governors to hold the school to account well.

The school has a good understanding of its context and promotes community cohesion well in the local community and through its international links. There are appropriate plans to enhance students' understanding and experience of diversity in the national community. Students from different ethnic groups get on well together. Engagement with parents and carers has been improved since the last inspection and is now good. However, some parents say that the system of referring all contacts to the heads of house can lead to delay in addressing their concerns.

The school promotes equal opportunities and tackles discrimination in a variety of ways. PSHE lessons and the specialist arts provision promote racial harmony and regard for human rights. Sixth form students contribute to Amnesty International campaigns. The racial incidents and bullying logs are regularly reported to governors. The school meets statutory requirements to have equality schemes for race, disability and gender, but there are few progress reports on their implementation.

Arrangements for safeguarding students are satisfactory. All adults are properly vetted and all appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. The child protection training covers

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all staff and includes guidance on identifying signs of abuse. Students say that they have someone to talk to about any concerns they might have and that any significant cases of bullying are tackled.

The school has recently appointed a business manager and now has a good understanding of its financial position. Without an additional source of funds, there is little hope of replacing the large number of temporary classrooms.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

- students contribute to Amnesty International campaigns. The racial incidents and bullying logs are regularly reported to governors. The school meets statutory requirements to have equality schemes for race, disability and gender, but there are few progress reports on their implementation.

Arrangements for safeguarding students are satisfactory. All adults are properly vetted and all appropriate risk assessments are undertaken. The child protection training covers all staff and includes guidance on identifying signs of abuse. Students say that they have someone to talk to about any concerns they might have and that any significant cases of bullying are tackled.

The school has recently appointed a business manager and now has a good understanding of its financial position. Without an additional source of funds, there is little hope of replacing the large number of temporary classrooms. These are the grades for leadership and management The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement

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Taking into account:

The leadership and management of teaching and learning 2 3 The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met 2 The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers 2 The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being 2 The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination 2 The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures 3 The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion 2 The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money 3

Sixth form Students make good progress in most subjects and standards are high, particularly in AS level examinations. Students are well motivated and respond well to the good teaching they receive. Many lessons help students to develop higher order skills, such as analytic and critical thinking, and encourage them to broaden their education through wider reading. The community service programme, general studies lessons and timetabled provision for sports all help to ensure students' good personal development. Sixth formers also contribute to the school community by mentoring younger students and through involvement in the committees responsible for their health, safety and well-being. One student commented, 'We are encouraged to take on responsibilities such as community work that helps our all-round development.' Another wrote, 'Academically, I've come on in leaps and bounds. The sixth form is a wonderful experience.'

The sixth form curriculum provides good opportunities for academic study and participation is high in the specialist arts and science subjects. There are few vocational courses but a high proportion of Year 11 students take up places in nearby further education colleges each year. Progression routes within the sixth form are being planned for students who are currently taking the creative and media diploma in Key Stage 4.

Care, guidance and support is very good in the sixth form. Students say they get outstanding support with their applications for higher education and this is reflected in the high proportion that secure places each year. However, they would like better study facilities and more reliable access to ICT.

Leadership of the sixth form is shared between the head of sixth form and senior leaders. The head of sixth form provides very good leadership of the pastoral aspects, including very efficient monitoring of students' progress. Other senior staff are responsible for monitoring the quality of provision in individual subjects, and, although good overall, this varies in quality.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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Views of parents and carers

The response rate from parents and carers of Key Stage 4 students was low because Year 10 students were out of school on work experience. Although the vast majority of parents and carers who responded were happy with their children's experience, roughly one in four included comments about specific concerns. One recurrent theme was the difficulty of contacting the heads of house. Others were concerned about teaching and learning, such as one who wrote 'My only criticism is its inability to challenge more able students.' On the other hand, some were full of praise. Generally, parents' comments reflected the findings of the inspection, with several concerns about teaching in certain subjects and a general feeling that the new headteacher was bringing about improvement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Wymondham High 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 received 285 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1550 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	110	39	163	57	6	2	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	108	38	162	57	4	1	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	97	34	160	56	16	6	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	87	31	168	59	16	6	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	81	28	174	61	11	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	55	19	162	57	46	16	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	54	19	182	64	26	9	5	2
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)	84	29	154	54	11	4	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	87	31	163	57	14	5	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	62	22	160	56	22	8	8	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	59	21	153	54	20	7	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	118	41	141	49	7	2	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	121	42	153	54	7	2	1	0

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



4 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Wymondham High School, Wymondham NR18 0QT

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and helping us with the inspection. You attend a satisfactory school which has several good aspects, including the sixth form. Your personal development and well-being are good and your contribution to the school and wider community is outstanding. Your examination results are above average at GCSE and high in the sixth form but you could be doing even better. You make satisfactory academic progress and are well prepared for your future working lives.

We talked to several of you and received 173 questionnaires. Nearly all of you said that you enjoy school, learn a lot in lessons and feel safe. You feel that adults care about you and you rate the school leadership highly. One in five of you were not sure that the school helps you to be healthy and a few were concerned about behaviour.

The inspectors feel that behaviour is good compared to other schools and that the school tries hard to keep you healthy. Your progress is satisfactory in lessons because teaching is more often satisfactory than good. However, teaching is good in the sixth form. We agree that the school cares for you well and that the school is well led.

The school has been through a difficult time because it has had three changes of leadership in a short time. Mrs Musgrave is keen to improve the school and to make it outstanding. We think this is a good ambition, and that the school has a good capacity to get better.

We have suggested that the school focuses on making sure that:

- every student makes good progress by setting challenging targets and supporting any who fall behind
- teachers and teaching assistants assess how well different students are learning, and give extra support or more challenging work where it is needed
- learning support is well organised
- all senior leaders focus strongly on improving the school.

Thank you again. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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