

William Ellis School

Highgate Road, London NW5 1RN

Inspection dates

24–25 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school has improved a great deal in the last two years because leadership has been stable and effective. Parents and students are right to have confidence in its future.
- The sixth form is good. Sharper leadership and regular checks on progress mean that students who attend regularly achieve well.
- GCSE results have gone up, particularly in mathematics and science, where students' progress exceeds expectations. Students achieve well in most subjects.
- The large majority of students behave well and are keen to learn. In all year groups, they feel safe and enjoy school life.
- Professional development for teachers is well considered and leading to improvements.
- Teaching is predominantly good. Faculty and subject leaders, as well as senior leaders, check its quality regularly to be sure that students are learning as well as possible.
- 'Deep Learning' days, when students study topics related to their personal development, give them excellent insight into a wide range of issues and decisions they face in their lives.
- Building on the excellent work of the interim headteacher, senior leaders, managers and governors have moved leadership and teaching into a higher gear. Staff morale is high because, as one teacher observed, 'The headteacher is leading and pulling everyone here along.'

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of GCSE and A level A*/A grades is not high enough in some subjects.
- A few of the lower attaining students, weak readers and those with special educational needs do not achieve as well as they should.
- Teachers do not always emphasise reading and writing skills, prepare work that matches students' different abilities or mark their work in the most helpful way.
- Sixth form attendance is low.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 half lessons (some with members of the senior leadership team). They attended an assembly and tutor groups sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, many members of the senior leadership team, some heads of department and heads of year, the Chair and three other members of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and several groups of students.
- The documents inspectors examined included ones related to progress since the previous inspection, attendance, behaviour incidents, development plans, lesson observations, monitoring procedures and data on standards and progress.
- Inspectors took into account parental surveys undertaken by the school, 32 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) and letters from parents. Inspectors also considered the views of 54 staff who completed a questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clare Gillies, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jennifer Bray	Additional Inspector
Robin Gaff	Additional Inspector
Roger Garrett	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- An interim headteacher took up post in September 2010, a couple of months before the previous inspection. She handed over to the present, permanent headteacher in September 2011.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Just under two fifths of students are of White British heritage. Other students represent several minority ethnic groups, particularly Black African, Bangladeshi and other White backgrounds.
- The movement of students in and out of school at times other than the start of Year 7 is above the national average and one fifth come from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds.
- About two fifths of students speak English as an additional language, most of them fluently.
- A well above average proportion of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is a little above average. The proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is above average. The most common need relates to behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.
- The school uses off-site provision at Westminster College and Westminster Art College.
- The school exceeds the government's current floor target which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The sixth form is part of LaSwap, a long-established consortium of four local schools (La Sainte Union, William Ellis, Acland Burghley and Parliament Hill School).
- In addition, the school operates a joint sixth form with the neighbouring Parliament Hill School.
- Analysing AS and A level results and the impact of sixth form teaching is complicated because:
 - students from all four LaSwap schools may be taught at William Ellis and William Ellis students may be taught in one or more of the other schools.
 - Year 11 William Ellis students who stay on into Year 12 are enrolled in the school but some are based and tutored at Parliament Hill School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Quicken pupils' progress in all subject in order to raise standards by:
 - challenging all students to aim for the highest grades, regardless of their starting points
 - extending students' vocabulary and accuracy in spelling and writing in all subjects
 - encouraging students, particularly sixth formers and those who speak English as an additional language, to read widely
 - using the new tracking system effectively to tackle poor attendance in the sixth form.
- Improve teaching and learning by making sure that all teachers:
 - prepare work that fully matches individual students' abilities and aptitudes
 - assess and mark students' work regularly and make it clear what they need to do to get a higher grade
 - give students time to discuss and reflect on the comments written in their books and time to work independently and together
 - use a wide variety of visual and written materials to stimulate students' interest.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment on entry is average but reading ages vary considerably, from eight to 17 in Year 7. Students entering the sixth form have slightly below average attainment.
- In well over half the subjects taught at William Ellis, students exceeded the national percentage of A level A*-C grades in 2012 and did well in vocational courses. The percentage of A*/B grades was slightly below average. This reflects underachievement by a few higher attainers.
- Nevertheless, the large majority of the 2012 Year 13 students went on to university, with most others taking a planned gap year or gaining employment.
- With improved teaching and leadership, AS results improved in 2012 for sixth formers enrolled at William Ellis. Close to 90% of these students, and current Year 12 students, are now making good progress.
- There is an upward trend in the percentage of students attaining five A*-C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Results in most other subjects improved in 2012. They were well above average in mathematics, science, art, history and music.
- Achievement in lessons is good and progress over time is improving. Students who speak English as an additional language do as well as others. Some students with special educational needs achieve well compared to the school's and national results but a small minority do not. Nevertheless, most of them make good progress in English, mathematics and science.
- The average points score of students eligible for free school meals is above that seen nationally. The gap between these students' and others' results is slightly smaller than the national one but it has not narrowed in recent years. Senior leaders are aware of this and are using the pupil premium money to reduce the gap.
- The pattern of underachievement by a few minority ethnic students and those from refugee backgrounds fluctuates, partly because their numbers change and because other factors, such as attendance and learning needs, are more dominant. The school analyses results meticulously in order to respond to students' needs.

The quality of teaching is good

- Whilst there is more consistently good teaching than a couple of years ago, not much is of the highest quality, meaning that progress is not as rapid as it could be and a few students make slower progress. Senior leaders know this and are tackling it boldly through professional development in the main school and across LaSwap.
- Features that the best teaching has in common and which are now being shared include:
 - an expectation of high standards and a pace that students do not find daunting but which keeps them on their toes
 - teachers selecting students randomly to answer questions so they all have to stay alert
 - students holding up mini-whiteboards to show answers so teachers can quickly check understanding and adjust the next steps
 - teachers encouraging students to ask questions and making it clear that they are happy to explain something more than once
 - students being given time to discuss work together in pairs or groups
 - using an imaginative range of visual and other materials.
- Students who speak English as an additional language are right to feel well supported. Nevertheless, in all year groups, they and many other students need more constant encouragement to extend their vocabulary, read widely and write well at length. The school's focus on literacy is bearing fruit but not all teachers include this consistently.
- Most other adults guiding students with special educational needs give them good support, especially when they have expertise in the subjects they work in. One-to-one literacy sessions

are working well.

- In addition to successful teaching, the science faculty is clear that, in addition to consistently good teaching, it achieves such good results by:
 - raising the profile of examinations with parents as well as students
 - calling or texting parents to make them aware of imminent revision or test sessions
 - having a user-friendly website with links to relevant sites.
- Only a few students are entered early for GCSEs and none of them miss out on the highest grades they can achieve. For example, the top set in mathematics (92% A* grades in 2012) or borderline grade C students to confirm the quality of internal assessment in English.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students are polite and welcoming, appreciating that all the recent improvements have led to better learning and progress. They usually behave sensibly around the school or in lessons. Exclusions rose in the headteacher's first year but have since fallen. Behaviour in a Year 7 assembly during the inspection was exemplary.
- Attendance has improved considerably in the main school although a few students continue to have poor records, especially in the sixth form. Efforts to improve sixth form attendance have not yet changed the situation but new software to track it is being installed which will help the situation.
- Students, whatever their ethnic backgrounds, get on well together and have respectful relationships with teachers. They believe that rewards and punishments are reasonable and that more staff apply them fairly.
- Despite believing in tolerance of other faiths and lifestyles, a few students acknowledge that, amongst themselves, homophobia has not been completely eradicated. Racist and bullying incidents are declining and staff tackle them quickly and effectively. A recent survey revealed the good practice of recording the actions taken, the advice given and the outcomes over time.
- The Deep Learning day that took place during the inspection focused on choices and consequences. It was very well organised, involving many organisations such as Young Victims Support, and Diversity Role Models. Outside speakers described life in prison, or the spiritual aspects of modern moral dilemmas. From the previous year's plans, it is clear that all Deep Learning days are informative and thought-provoking and a major contributor to students' personal development.
- Students appreciate how well the heads of year oversee the very good academic and pastoral support they receive.
- Sixth form students value the support and guidance they receive and appreciate the extra-curricular opportunities offered, such as a cultural week when they focus on lifestyles in other countries. Students have several opportunities to go abroad and experience these for themselves.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is widely respected. He has made his expectation of high standards in every aspect of school life transparent to staff, all of whom are on board. 'I joined two years ago and the difference is massive', wrote one. Consistency in all areas is not yet established. Clear direction and stability in the special educational needs department have not been secured, for example.
- All staff know the dates for the checking of teaching, work sampling and achievement, and know that the outcomes are linked to their performance management. Faculty and subject leaders, who now lead effectively and liaise productively, welcome this tight structure. Accurate data,

analysed by numerous groups, are useful for staff.

- The pupil premium funding is used carefully and adjusted if necessary. A special group for low attainers in Year 7 did not generate the rapid progress wanted, so it has not been repeated. In addition to continuing several successful initiatives, such as part-time link workers with Somali, Bengali and Congolese families, the pupil premium for 2012-2013 is funding eleven full-time, 'City Year' volunteers. These enthusiastic young adults are working with low achievers, particularly White working class boys. Several low attaining students' attitudes to school are already much better.
 - Teachers do not move up pay scales if they have not met all their performance management targets. Governors and senior leaders make it clear when they are not happy with a teacher's performance. Lesson observations and performance management feed into teachers' professional development. Evidence of its success is reflected in students' comments that more teachers now write helpful and constructive comments when marking work.
 - Parents are pleased with the school's changed fortunes. 'We have been absolutely delighted with the way things are now going', one wrote. Although low in number, the responses to the Parent View were overwhelmingly positive. All agreed, for example, that the school is well led and managed.
 - Since 2010, the local authority has provided expertise which has contributed well to the school's improvements. With the interim headteacher now working with the school on behalf of the local authority, support continues most effectively. The school's self-evaluation is honest, precise and accurate, linked to a clear development plan.
 - The success of off-site placements is reviewed regularly and, as a result, students were moved from one Westminster college site to another, where they are now making good progress. The school receives weekly reports on them so it can check how well they are doing.
 - Governors were involved in appointing a new sixth form director and assistant director who split their time between William Ellis and Parliament Hill, the joint schools within the consortium. They have introduced lesson observations across the consortium and have brought about sharper analysis of achievement, and better, though not yet good enough, attendance.
 - LaSwap's curriculum offer is huge and of good quality, one of the many benefits of the consortium. The main school curriculum has been changed so that Year 7 students study only one modern foreign language and choose whether to do two in Year 8 and at GCSE. This is a good decision, meeting the needs of students needing extra help with English or managing their behaviour. In addition to the successful Deep Learning days, there is a very good range of sports, performing arts, other extra activities and trips and visits.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are fully involved in discussions about how the pupil premium is spent, which groups are involved, and monitoring whether it is making a difference. They give strong leadership because they know exactly what is happening in the school, especially in terms of the quality of teaching and how performance management is used to reward teachers or challenge them to improve. They ensure safeguarding arrangements are meticulous, for example spot-checks on sixth formers' identification badges on entry after break. Governors have much confidence in the headteacher and senior leaders but still probe decisions and press for standards to be higher. Many governors bring a wealth of experience in education to their deliberations but continue to attend training to keep themselves up to date.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	100056
Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	404709

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	873
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	253
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Millar
Headteacher	Sam White
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 November 2010
Telephone number	020 7267 9346
Fax number	020 7284 1274
Email address	info@williamellis.camden.sch.uk

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