

Wolsingham School and Community College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114297
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	301964
Inspection dates	28–29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Heather Richardson 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
Number on roll	
School	790
6th form	129
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Kirkby
Headteacher	Ms Andrea Crawshaw
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2003
School address	Leazes Lane Wolsingham Bishop Auckland County Durham DL13 3DN
Telephone number	01388 527302
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wolsingham School and Community College is smaller than average and serves a rural area to the west of Durham. The area as a whole has similar levels of prosperity to the national averages, but there are pockets of deprivation and unemployment. There are slightly fewer girls than boys. Almost all students are White British; a tiny proportion speaks English as an additional language. Students reflect the full ability range. When they join the school, their average standard of attainment is similar to the national average, but is slightly lower in some year groups. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is below the national average, but the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has increased and is now slightly above average. The proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals is broadly average. Most students travel to school by bus and some travel considerable distances. The school has specialist status as a performing arts college, with the addition of a rural dimension.

It works in partnership with other providers to extend the curriculum choices for students in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. The school holds a number of national awards including the Healthy Schools Standard, Eco Silver, Artsmark Gold and the Philip Lawrence Award for multicultural understanding.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Wolsingham School and Community College is a good school which has improved significantly since its previous inspection. Standards have risen markedly at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and are now broadly in line with national averages. Students' current work and the evidence from the school's accurate records show that standards are continuing to rise. Students make good progress during their time in school in relation to their starting points, and also in comparison with schools in similar circumstances. The school has raised standards through determined and effective leadership, spearheaded by the clear vision and sense of purpose of the headteacher. This vision and commitment is shared by all staff. There has been a sharp focus on improving teaching and learning, together with the development of robust systems to monitor both students' progress and the effectiveness of the school.

One result of the school's drive for improvement is that teaching and learning are now good. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan well-structured and enjoyable lessons which engage students' interest. Most students enjoy learning and their positive attitudes help them to make good progress in their work. Teachers pay good attention to helping students to review what they have learnt in each lesson. Students' work is often marked well, with comments which provide clear feedback to students on what they have achieved and what they need to do next. However, this is not always the case and careless presentation of work sometimes goes unchallenged. The school has considered carefully how it can best meet the learning needs of all students. Some of the provision is effective, including the targeted support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or for those needing extra support in preparation for national tests and examinations. Hence students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The more able students achieve well in some areas, such as mathematics at Key Stage 3, but are not challenged sufficiently in all lessons. The school has introduced some strategies to help all students to take more responsibility for their own learning, but too few opportunities are provided at present.

Students' personal development is good and is illustrated in the good relationships they enjoy with adults in school and with their peers. Students say that they feel safe in school. This reflects the good care, guidance and support which the school provides, including its support for vulnerable students. The school is particularly effective in helping students to transfer from their primary schools and make decisions about which courses to follow when they are older.

The good quality and breadth of the school's curriculum contributes to students' overall success and also reflects the school's commitment to meeting the needs of all learners. As a result, students are well prepared for their futures and a very high proportion continue into education or training. The school has made very good use of its specialist status in developing the courses available to students and the wide range of additional activities and clubs. These help students to develop a good understanding of their locality and of other cultures in the wider world. The school's specialist status has been a significant factor in its improvement. Although the results in its specialist subjects are variable, the school has used specialist strategies and resources for teaching and learning to raise overall standards and enrich provision. Much innovative and purposeful work is being undertaken which benefits students and the school's partners. The school has high aspirations and has good, proven capacity for further improvement. It provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards in the sixth form are average and students' achievement is satisfactory. A-level results improved in 2007 and were similar to national averages. Results in vocational courses were better than in the academic A-levels. Girls did not achieve as well as boys in 2006, but the school's effective action redressed the balance in 2007. AS level results for Year 12 students had been lower than they should have been in the previous two years. The school's current data show that standards have at least been maintained in Year 13 and have improved in Year 12. Results in the intermediate level two vocational courses in 2007 were good and enabled students to access further training and qualifications.

Sixth formers benefit from access to a wide range of academic A-level courses and a good selection of vocational programmes which link well with employment patterns in the locality. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving as the school works to ensure that students achieve their potential. Students' progress is monitored closely, with improved systems now in place. Students recognise the benefits of this monitoring. They value the good level of support and guidance that they receive. They also value the choice of courses and the opportunities they have for participating in many activities outside lessons. They respond well to the varied opportunities to take responsibility. They are very positive about the sixth form and offer mature opinions. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory, as is the value for money. There is good capacity for further improvement, as the steps taken to improve provision and outcomes for students are already making a difference.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the best examples to improve the overall quality and consistency of marking.
- Ensure that more able learners are challenged at all times.
- Provide more opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are rising briskly across the school because leaders at all levels have common effective strategies in place to secure continuous improvement. Several of these emanate from the school's specialist status. As a consequence, boys and girls are achieving well. Students join the school in Year 7 with standards that are broadly average for their age but frequently slightly lower than that. Results in the national tests in Year 9 have risen sharply between 2005 and 2007. They are broadly average overall but better in mathematics than in science and English, especially at the higher levels. Current standards in the school confirm a continuing upward trend. This is the result of the school working towards ever more challenging targets and students' positive attitudes.

GCSE results have also risen sharply between 2005 and 2007 in response to strategies similar to those being employed in Years 7 to 9. Results in 2007 were significantly better than those achieved by students from similar backgrounds across the country as a whole, and good in other respects too. Given their starting points when they joined the school this represents good progress. The proportion of students who achieved five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was similar to the national averages. The proportion with five or more

A* to G grades was above average. No student left school without qualifications, which is a strong feature of the school's work. This is one example of the good achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Current standards in Years 10 and 11 confirm the continuing upward trend.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most students have a very positive attitude towards learning and enjoy school. Their attendance is satisfactory and improving. They build good relationships with one another and with staff. Students' behaviour is generally good, but there is some immature behaviour at times at break-time. Students say that they feel safe in school and that any concerns, including bullying, are dealt with quickly by adults they trust. Most welcome opportunities to take responsibility, such as acting as a mentor or 'Amigo', or by assisting younger students with their reading. Students make a positive contribution to their local community and to communities further afield through activities such as charity fundraising. They show good understanding of how to stay healthy by taking exercise and many participate in sporting activities. They are aware of healthy foods, but do not always make healthy choices in the dining hall. Students develop a good range of skills for employment and future economic well-being. For some students these skills now include specialist rural crafts, linked to the school's specialist status.

Students' moral and social development is good and they know the difference between right and wrong. Students welcome opportunities to develop their social skills, for example, in extra-curricular activities, as many travel in from isolated rural areas. Students demonstrate a good awareness of cultural diversity as shown by their involvement in festivals and links with other countries, including Canada. Spiritual development is good, as illustrated in their sensitive responses in poems written for Remembrance Day.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

There is a consistent approach to lesson planning throughout the school. The best lessons have clear learning objectives, so students know what they will learn and what they need to do to achieve a particular grade or level. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and end purposefully with opportunities for students to review the knowledge or skills they have gained. Teachers use a range of interesting activities so students are engaged actively in their learning. Group work provides good opportunities for students to work collaboratively, but they are not always confident when feeding back their findings to the whole class. Teachers use questions purposefully to ascertain what students know and to challenge them to extend their thinking. The behaviour and attitudes of students are good and this helps them to make good progress. Students are becoming more involved in the assessment of their own and each others' work. This is building their confidence and helping them to improve their own work. In less successful but still satisfactory lessons, learning objectives are less clear and the work provided is not always sufficiently challenging for the most able students. Teachers sometimes talk too much so that students spend too little time learning for themselves and with other students. Some

work is marked well, but marking is inconsistent and is not always helpful in telling students how to improve. Teaching assistants are used well to support those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially in the 'shelter groups'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and well adapted to the needs of individual students. There is a clear emphasis on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) across the school and the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for. The school's commitment to find courses that will raise the aspirations and self-esteem of all its students has led to more vocational options and an alternative curriculum for students at risk of disaffection. Links with local colleges and businesses have been established to support the curriculum. The school is beginning to develop links between subjects, although opportunities to develop students' writing in all subjects are sometimes missed.

The school's specialist status has enriched the curriculum. This has included the development of courses in drama and dance, as well as programmes linked to the local rural environment. These courses have strengthened even further a curriculum that offers an impressive range of activities to support students' learning. There is also a strong programme of extra-curricular activities in sports, arts and academic subjects in which many students participate.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school takes good care of all students and especially those who are vulnerable or have learning or behavioural difficulties. They thrive in the 'shelter groups' where every opportunity is taken to build up their confidence and self-esteem. The school works well with other agencies to ensure that students and their families receive support when necessary. Thorough induction procedures enable Year 7 students to settle quickly. They benefit from the strong partnerships the school has built with primary schools. Older students receive good guidance and support when making subject and career choices. The school monitors students' progress well, and effective action is taken when students need additional support or challenge. Students are set challenging targets to encourage them to reach their full potential.

The school's arrangements for child protection, the safeguarding of students and risk assessments are robust and reviewed regularly. The local authority has now given its commitment to support the school in resolving outstanding issues about movement between sites.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school's leadership is clearly focused on raising standards and improving the quality of provision for its students. Ably led by the headteacher, the school's senior leaders have raised expectations and made effective use of challenging targets to improve test and examination results for students. They know the school well and have developed sound systems for

monitoring the work of the school. They have been successful because they have built a shared understanding with staff about the priorities for improvement. They have harnessed available resources well, including making effective use of the school's specialist status, to bring about improvement. There has been a strong emphasis on providing good professional development to extend the expertise of staff and so improve teaching and learning. Middle leaders play an increasingly effective role because their roles are clear and they have responded well to the expectations made of them to lead improvement in their areas and monitor students' progress. Governors are well-informed and provide good challenge and support to the school. Parents who responded to the questionnaire for the inspection were largely supportive of the school's work.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Wolsingham School and Community College, Durham, DL13 3DN

On behalf of the inspection team I would like to thank you for the help which you gave to us when we visited your school recently. We were very interested in all that you had to tell us, including the opportunities you have for additional activities. I hope the production of 'Grease' was successful. I know that you and your teachers had put a lot of effort into preparing for it.

We think that you go to a good school which has improved significantly since it was last inspected. You will know that the school's results in national tests and examinations have improved in recent years. These results and the progress you are making in lessons means that, overall, you are making good progress during your time at school. We were pleased to see that so many of you enjoy your lessons and work hard. The school is providing you with a good choice of subjects and a wide range of other activities which many of you enjoy. Some of these benefits are because the school specialises in performing arts and rural issues.

You told us that you felt safe in school and could trust teachers and the 'Amigos' if you had concerns. The school provides good care for all of you, and also provides good guidance. Examples of this are the way in which Year 7 students are helped to settle in quickly and the guidance which older students receive when making important decisions about which courses to follow.

One of the reasons why the school is doing well is because of the leadership of Ms Crawshaw and the assistant headteachers. They have set themselves, and you, some challenging targets because they want the school to get better still. We have made some suggestions to build on what has already been achieved. Your lessons are good, but we think they could be better still if you have more opportunities to take responsibility for your own work. We also think that some of you should have harder work to do on occasions. Some of your work is marked well, so that you have a clear idea of how to improve, and we have asked your teachers to make all marking like this. We have also asked them to get tough about the presentation of your work, so I hope you will rise to the challenge.

I hope that you will continue to enjoy all that your school has to offer and that you will be successful.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson HMI

on behalf of the inspection team