

William Ellis School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100056
Local Authority	Camden
Inspection number	307290
Inspection dates	26–27 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Elaine Taylor HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	931
6th form	296
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Vernon King
Headteacher	Mr Malcolm Rose (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2004
School address	Highgate Road London NW5 1RN
Telephone number	020 7267 9346
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

William Ellis is a voluntary aided, non-denominational school for boys in north London. The school is slightly smaller than most secondary schools and has a joint sixth form with Parliament Hill School of approximately 600 students, both boys and girls. The sixth form also operates in a federation with two other schools with a combined total of approximately 1250 students. It has been a specialist language college since 1997. The students come from a diverse socio-economic area with above average numbers of students eligible for free school meals and above average numbers from minority ethnic groups and with English as an additional language. Fewer students in the main school have additional learning needs than found nationally. Following the resignation of the headteacher in late January 2008, the school is being led by the deputy, who is also the director of the sixth form.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

William Ellis is a satisfactory school that has recently been through a difficult period in its history. It is now working hard with its partners and the local authority to address the issues that arose during that time. The school has a good sixth form.

The students enter the school having achieved standards that are in line with expectations. They make more rapid progress during their first three years in the school than in Years 10 and 11. Standards in national tests at the end of Key Stage 4 have fluctuated in the last two years, but are broadly average. The upward trend in GCSE standards halted in 2007 when results dropped unexpectedly from above to just below national averages. This indicates that achievement overall is satisfactory.

The personal development and well-being of the students are good. They demonstrate mutual support and care for each other, work collaboratively and understand the consequences of their actions. Their moral and social development is good. They show mutual respect and tolerance for other faiths and cultures in a racially harmonious school. There is a clear and successful commitment to racial equality. The school has a Healthy Schools award, and boys understand what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They also conduct themselves in a safe manner in school and are aware of how to stay safe, looking after themselves and each other. Boys enjoy being in school and are keen to express a sense of belonging and commitment to the school community.

Although some parents expressed concerns about behaviour in the school, inspectors found that behaviour is satisfactory overall and is clearly linked to the quality of teaching and learning. Where teachers engage and involve boys in active learning, they are interested and enthusiastic. In more mundane, didactic lessons, students indulge in off-task behaviour and the pace of learning is impaired. Students' contribution to the community is good. Language College status has helped them to develop a good understanding of the international community. A wide range of trips, cross-curricular ventures, in-school activities and the positive impact of guests from different cultural backgrounds all enhance this.

The school considers teaching satisfactory and inspectors agree. With support from the local authority, the school is focusing on improving teaching and learning through the development of an agreed monitoring programme. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. In most lessons seen, relationships between staff and students were good. In some lessons, activities do not provide challenge to all students in what is often a wide range of ability. The school's environment does not support learning effectively, as many of the resources for learning, including displays, are out of date and of poor quality.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Following a comprehensive review to make it more relevant to the students, a new option system for 14-16 courses is being implemented, enabling the provision of a greater range of subjects and more choice for students. The school's status as a specialist language college is having a satisfactory impact across the curriculum.

The care, guidance and support students receive are good. Boys feel well cared for and supported in a secure environment, a strength of which is the in-depth knowledge that teachers have of their individual needs. Students causing concern are identified early and valuable additional help ensures that they are well supported. Students know their targets and how to improve. Parents are kept informed at progress review days, parents' evenings and through written reports. The academic tracking systems are relatively new and teachers do not yet use the

information they provide consistently in their planning. Technical difficulties with information and communication technology (ICT) systems have hampered progress in this work, but leaders in the school are now able to use the data produced more effectively to set targets.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been several changes which have strengthened the school's position and mean it now has satisfactory capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

William Ellis School is part of the La Swap consortium which comprises four schools. Good quality provision is leading to improving standards and students achieve well. Most students mature into thoughtful and articulate young people. The schools collaborate effectively through a well-established partnership but, overall, strategic planning lacks rigour.

The school's A level results are close to average with most students attaining the grades they need to proceed to university or further study. Students achieve well. Those with average GCSE results mostly achieve better than those with higher grades. The percentage of A grades and the value-added for the higher attaining students have improved in the last three years.

Teaching and learning are good although the school recognises that students do not do enough independent work or private study.

The La Swap Consortium is popular and oversubscribed. Students choose from a very good range of academic courses, including specialist subjects, and a small but increasing number of vocational courses. Despite the introduction of electronic registration in all schools, sixth form attendance and punctuality remains a major issue.

La Swap offers an excellent choice of enrichment activities, a few involving voluntary work in the local community, but the school does not monitor what students do or how long they continue with an activity. They receive the same good care and support as in the main school and are confident that they are given helpful guidance on their future options for study and work. Leadership and management are good with strong teams of tutors, heads of year and directors liaising well together.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers use data on students' progress more effectively to plan learning activities which challenge all students to achieve highly.
- Develop the methods used by teachers to manage the behaviour of students in order to promote a more consistently positive attitude to learning.
- Ensure that data on students' progress is used more effectively by the school's leaders to set challenging targets and strengthen monitoring and evaluation so that weaknesses can be addressed with greater urgency.
- Improve the attendance and punctuality of sixth form students.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Present standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. Evidence provided by the school during the inspection suggests that 2008 results will be better than those in 2007 but not as high as those attained in 2006.

In 2007, results in GCSE examinations were average. Most groups made satisfactory progress, but a relatively small group of Black African students underachieved, as did students in need of the greatest support. The school has taken effective action to intervene more effectively with all students at risk of underperforming. More able students achieved well in 2007 and an above average number gained the top grades. Results continued to be good in English literature, mathematics, the separate sciences, music, graphics and drama.

In the national tests for Year 9 in 2007, the percentage of boys attaining at least the expected level in English exceeded the school's target and was just above average. Mathematics results were above average, especially at the higher levels, but students' performance in science was less impressive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Spiritual development is satisfactory overall. Cultural development is good, due in large part to the multi-cultural harmony that is fostered in school and the impact of Language College status, which promotes an understanding and appreciation of global cultures and languages. The social and moral development of the students is good and supported very effectively by the use of the Mill, a residential outdoor education centre owned by the school. Attendance is satisfactory, although internal punctuality to lessons could be better. There are good relationships between adults and students. Students are committed to the school as an internally supportive community but also participate actively in wider ranging activities, business ventures, work experience and support in the local community.

The development of workplace skills is satisfactory. Work experience and business and finance courses support this aspect. However, literacy and ICT skills are weaker. The school council meets regularly, but the school recognises that there is room to develop more opportunities for students to influence developments.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Where learning is good, students are challenged and motivated. This is as a result of careful planning, good organisation, creative use of resources and understanding students' learning needs. However, not all teachers are making sufficiently high demands on their students by encouraging them to work independently. Where teaching is satisfactory it is competent, but generally uninspiring. In the satisfactory lessons observed

during the inspection, students undertook the tasks set and were content to follow the teacher's instructions. However, they were not encouraged to explore new ideas for themselves or to share ideas with each other.

There are some weaknesses in the assessment of pupils' work and the use of homework. For example, there are inconsistencies in the feedback pupils receive in lessons and in the quality of marking of their books. This means that they do not always have a clear enough understanding of how to improve the standard of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of individual students with improved courses and activities to prepare them for their working life. Strategies to provide additional support have been put in place for underachieving students. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of activities notably sports and music. The quantity, quality and popularity of extra-curricular opportunities such as sports and drama as well as visits and residential trips make a good contribution to students' personal and academic development. All students have the opportunity to learn two languages in Key Stage 3 and the impact of the school's specialist status is reflected satisfactorily within physical education (PE), Humanities and Performing Arts. However, it is under-developed across the wider curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Boys told inspectors that they feel comfortable and safe at William Ellis. Students are confident that they can confide in someone at school who will act upon their concerns. In particular, the mentoring system in which Year 11 students advise and guide Year 7 boys is highly regarded by both, and an extension of the scheme to other year groups is being implemented. Other professionals involved in the care of students are kept effectively informed by the school of students who are at risk. Students who have English as an additional language are identified on entry and undergo a programme of intervention which takes into account both English linguistic and cultural aspects, as well as celebrating the culture of the first language. Teachers are helped to develop their knowledge and understanding of strategies for supporting these students in class. This is having a beneficial effect on other boys in the groups. A strength of the support provided is the care and attention with which boys are welcomed into the school in Year 7 and the detailed information and guidance boys receive when considering post-16 courses. Careers guidance is a strong feature of practice.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Although standards fell in 2007, other aspects of the school's work have remained positive. Leaders have evaluated the work of the school accurately and have a realistic understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Issues from the previous inspection have mostly

been tackled with success, but there remain some where progress has been impaired by the recent difficulties. The school recognises that these must be tackled with determination. There have been serious budgetary difficulties recently and the school is working closely with the governors and the local authority to rectify the situation. Well-defined plans are in place to remove the deficit whilst minimising the impact on learning. However, at present the school is failing to provide satisfactory value for money. The acting headteacher has the confidence of the parents and the staff, and is supported by a senior team with an appropriate range of expertise. There is also an experienced team of middle leaders and, together, the leadership team is better placed to take the school forward. More rigorous systems are in place to monitor the work of the school and, supported by the local authority, the capacity to improve has been enhanced. Self-evaluation is accurate, but has only just started to involve all stakeholders. Governors are beginning to take an active part in the process. They have recently restructured the committees and are starting to gather first hand evidence of the day-to-day work of the school. Targets are being set, with an increased level of challenge, but these are not met by some groups of students. Specialist language college targets were missed last year for Key Stage 4, but met in Key Stage 3. All the legal requirements for safeguarding are in place.

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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?	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2

Achievement and standards

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

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	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	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?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

16 April 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of William Ellis School, London, NW5 1RN

On behalf of my colleagues and myself, I want to thank you all for the way you welcomed us into your school and helped us with our inspection. We were impressed by the way you all get along with each other and how sensibly and honestly you spoke to us about the school. We think your school is satisfactory, with a good sixth form.

You told us that you feel comfortable and safe at William Ellis and that you know there are people you can turn to if you need help. We agree that some of the accommodation needs improving and we know you are unhappy about the difficulties you face when equipment is damaged and therefore unavailable. We know the school has some financial difficulties at present, but we agree with you that you need more stimulating surroundings to help you to learn more effectively.

We think the teaching you receive is satisfactory and the way you are guided and supported is good. The school is giving you a satisfactory range of subjects to study and has firm plans in place to extend these. Those of you in the sixth form benefit from the extended opportunities provided in the La Swap consortium. The leaders of the school are working hard with the governors and the local authority to improve the school and we think you could be given more opportunities to influence the developments. I hope you will all try to get involved with the opportunities that emerge.

These are the priorities we have asked the school to address:

- make sure the work you are given is interesting and challenging for all of you
- encourage behaviour that helps everyone to learn and prevent those who behave less well from disrupting the learning of others. You have an obvious part to play in this
- set challenging improvement targets and check carefully that all aspects of the school's work are as effective as possible
- improve the attendance and punctuality of sixth form students - these students need to do their best to be on time and get to lessons.

We wish you all success in the future.

Elaine Taylor

Her Majesty's Inspector