

Wycombe High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110513
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	288698
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1349
6th form	392
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Branwen Kelly
Headteacher	Ms Jane Wainwright
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2003
School address	Marlow Road High Wycombe HP11 1TB
Telephone number	01494 523961
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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 four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Wycombe High School is a larger-than-average, popular and over-subscribed school. It is one of 13 grammar schools in the local authority, as such the attainment of students when they start school is exceptionally high. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low. Students are predominantly White British. A fifth of the students are from minority ethnic background, mainly of Pakistani heritage.

The school was awarded specialist status in mathematics and computing in 2005. It is part of the South Bucks 14–19 consortium.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features, particularly the leadership of the school and the personal development and well-being of students.

The headteacher, supported by excellent governance and senior leadership team, provides outstanding leadership. The headteacher leads the school with integrity. This inspires the whole school staff to have confidence in and share her vision. Some of the systems that the school has put in place have been highly effective. For instance, teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection as a result of training and support for teachers. Other systems need time to become established. For example, there is very good support for students not achieving as well as they can in Year 11 but these systems are not yet consistently implemented lower down the school. Consequently last year progress was slower for some students. This has now been addressed.

The processes for keeping the school's work under review and planning for improvement are excellent. The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors did not find any issues that the school was not already aware of and addressing.

Teaching and learning are good overall and outstanding in the sixth form. Senior leaders are committed to ensuring all teaching is at the level of the best in the school. The in-house programme of training, coaching and developing staff is exemplary and a strength of the school.

Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are exceptionally high; students make good progress from Years 7 to 11. Students in the sixth form make outstanding progress and achieve excellent results. The results for AS level music and business studies are amongst the best in the country. As a result of effective action, achievement in areas which were a cause for concern last year are no longer so.

The school's specialist status has had a good impact and improved provision. The number of students taking A level mathematics has increased significantly. Although good practice exists in the use of ICT (information communication technology) throughout the school, this is not yet consistent across the school.

'This school is a happy and secure place to be', a student told inspectors. Parents and students praise the care and support teachers provide to them and the range of extra curricular activities they are able to take part in. Students enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is excellent and their behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Students' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. This is seen in the numerous activities students initiate to support their local and wider community. Cultural development is good, the school recognises the need to develop the curriculum further so it increases students' cultural awareness.

Students are articulate, confident and courteous. The contribution they make to their school and local community is outstanding, ranging from the Horizon sports club for children with learning difficulties in the community to organising events for fellow students. They are very well prepared for life outside school and benefit from an excellent range of well thought out activities that contribute to their well-being.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form provision is outstanding. Leadership of the sixth form is innovative, very effective and a major reason for its continuing success. The majority of the students stay on in the sixth form and completion rates of courses are very high. Independent learning is a strong feature of sixth form life. Students learn in a secure and positive learning environment which is enriched by an excellent curriculum that is regularly reviewed to meet their needs. Tutors support students' pastoral and academic needs very effectively to complement the outstanding subject teaching. Hence, students make excellent progress and they achieve exceptionally high standards.

There is a regular and rigorous system for reviewing students' progress which ensures that early support is provided for those who are not working to their potential. A Year 13 student liked 'the fantastic support structure through which the teachers are always there to guide and praise students in a respectful and caring manner'. Sixth formers freely give their time for the benefit of the whole school. For example, prefects organise the school sports days and act as assistant tutors. This contributes to the exceptionally good relationships that exist within the sixth form and in the wider school community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the level of teaching so that all of it is as good as the best in the school.
- Extend the good support available for underperforming Year 11 students so it is consistent throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students enter the school with high attainment. They make good progress throughout the school and reach consistently high standards at all key stages. Students make good progress from Year 7 to Year 11 because teaching is good and students are eager learners. Students from minority ethnic groups also achieve very high standards and make similar progress to their peers. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the effective support they receive.

In 2006, there was a dip in the proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A* or A. Inspection evidence indicates that this weakness has been successfully addressed through improving teaching and learning strategies in lower-performing subjects. For example, gifted and talented students in art are now achieving much higher standards. In the sixth form, students make outstanding progress and achieve exceptionally high standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students enjoy coming to school as reflected in their excellent attendance levels and good behaviour. Their learning is enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as the 'camping on the school

field' weekend, origami club and magistrate courts mock trials. Students are involved in the subject reviews; their feedback on a range of issues usefully informs school development plans.

Relationships throughout the school are very good. Students report they feel safe and secure. They speak of very little bullying and are confident if encountered it will be dealt with effectively. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding and helps them develop confidence and self-esteem, as well as learning to become good citizens. For example, sixth form tutor assistants provide, amongst a range of activities, first aid and drugs awareness training for younger students. Students throughout the school arrange fund-raising events for school, local and international causes. The experience that students gain from carrying out duties, together with their very high skills in literacy and numeracy, prepares them very well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent and based on mutual respect.

In the majority of lessons teachers are successful in creating a classroom environment where students enjoy learning through challenging and stimulating activities. In outstanding lessons, teachers have high expectations, regularly assess students' understanding and allow time for extended answers and discussion. In these lessons students are encouraged to assess their own work and that of their peers to gain a clearer understanding of their progress.

A few lessons are overly led by teachers, and students are not challenged to explain their thinking. The school is rightly focusing on widening the role of assessment to support students' understanding and to help them develop more independent learning styles. Senior leaders offer an excellent professional development programme to improve teaching and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides a good curriculum which is well-matched to students' needs. The curriculum is broad and balanced and enriched by additional courses. The 'learning to learn' course develops well students' awareness of learning styles, study and revision skills and supports good progress and standards. The provision for economic well-being is enhanced considerably by careers education and activities to develop enterprise skills and financial literacy throughout the school. The school has successfully addressed the issues in the previous report regarding provision in mathematics and religious education. Provision for the use of ICT across the curriculum has also improved.

The curriculum promotes safe and healthy lifestyles. Provision made by the school to promote active citizenship is outstanding and includes charitable fund-raising activities, most of which are planned and organised by students, for example the Year 10 Community Event. There is a wide range of enrichment activities including trips, clubs and subject-related workshops. These are very popular and contribute much to students' enjoyment of school life and to their physical well-being.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are good overall with some outstanding features. The overwhelming majority of parents praise the care the school provides for their children. The school is systematic in monitoring attendance, behaviour and progress and has good evidence to show effectiveness in improving these areas. It has rigorous arrangements to ensure the safety of its students.

There is an excellent range of intervention support in place for vulnerable students, those with learning difficulties or medical needs. It is well-designed to ensure that concerns about individual students are identified and addressed at an early stage. Support staff work very effectively with teachers, heads of school and external agencies to offer outstanding support for vulnerable students. However, similar support for underachieving students is recognised by the school to be an area for further development. The school gives good academic guidance. Students know the levels of attainment at which they are working and their targets, and the majority know what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership; she is very ably supported by an excellent senior leadership team who share her commitment to excellence. Line management systems are highly effective and ensure senior and middle leaders have an accurate assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. These processes enable senior leaders to address areas of development swiftly, for example, in improving achievement in underperforming areas. They ensure staff have time to develop their professional practice.

Through regular line management meetings, senior leaders set clear direction for staff and monitor progress carefully. These forums enable senior leaders to hold middle leaders to account and provide support. Middle leaders provide very good leadership, they speak highly of the support and challenge provided by senior leaders. The impact of this is seen in the improvements made since the previous inspection.

The school development plan is arrived at collaboratively and involves all staff; one middle leader described this process as a 'top down and bottom up approach'. Students are also invited to evaluate subjects through focused student panels, this informs the school in its rigorous and detailed self-evaluation. The school has worked sensitively to promote community cohesion within the school and the local community. The school seeks to educate students in the widest sense, it has created extensive opportunities for students to develop themselves which they take up with enthusiasm and exceptional capacity throughout their time in school. These activities are rigorously evaluated to ensure impact on students' well-being.

The governors provide outstanding support. Issues arising from their regular visits to the school are taken up with senior leaders and fed back to the governing body. This ensures the governing body is very well informed of the work of the school and hence hold it to account. Governors fulfil their role as critical friends very effectively.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
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	1	
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

10 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Wycombe High School, Marlow Road, High Wycombe, HP11 1TB

On behalf of the inspectors and myself, I would like to thank you for the friendly and helpful way you welcomed us. We valued the discussions we had with many of you and are grateful for the way in which you shared your views about the school. In return, I want to tell you our findings.

Your school provides you with a good standard of education. Many of you told us you enjoy school and commented on the welcoming atmosphere and the ease with which you can talk to teachers. The teaching in your school is good, this enables you to make good progress and achieve very high standards. In the sixth form, the progress you make is outstanding.

We were particularly impressed with the many opportunities you take up to support each other in the school and people outside the school through your wide ranging activities. We were very pleased to see the way your school asks you to review subjects through the student panels.

The headteacher, senior leaders and governors provide outstanding leadership, they are determined to ensure all of you excel. They have very good systems in place to enable you to do so. In order to build on the successes even further, we agree with your school that they should:

- improve teaching so that all of it is as good as the best in the school
- extend the good support available to underperforming Year 11 students so it is consistent throughout the school.

We wish you and your school every success.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty's Inspector