

Wadham School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123893
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	328015
Inspection dates	16–17 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	643
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stuart Shepherd
Headteacher	Mr David Derbyshire
Date of previous school inspection	20 June 2007
School address	Mount Pleasant Yeovil Road Crewkerne TA18 7NT
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Age group	13-18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 23 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of the governing body, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, policy documents and students' work. They also scrutinised 81 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers and questionnaires completed by staff and a sample of students.

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

- the achievement of students throughout the school
- the extent to which provision meets the needs of all students, including the most able and minority groups, to ensure outcomes are equally strong for all students
- what features of teaching, learning and assessment promote enjoyment and help students make the best progress they can, given their starting points
- the effectiveness of curriculum team leaders in supporting the school's drive for improvement.

Information about the school

Wadham is considerably smaller than the average secondary school. It serves the small market town of Crewkerne, in which it is situated, as well as Ilminster and the surrounding rural areas. The school has specialist school status in business and enterprise and received re-designation early in 2009. Most students are of White British heritage and a very small percentage do not speak English as their first language. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well below the national average, as is the number with a statement of special educational needs. Few students are eligible for free school meals. The school has attained Healthy School status.

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

Wadham is a satisfactory school but one which has seen significant improvement in many areas since its last inspection. Attainment, which was low three years ago, has steadily improved. The most recent examination results for those students who have just left Year 11 show a significant rise over previous years. The progress made by different groups over their time at the school has also improved and is securely satisfactory for all students. Students' behaviour is now good and leads to an increasingly positive attitude towards learning. Notably attendance is now above average. Students are welcoming and polite and this contributes to the positive change in perception about the school in the community.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form are satisfactory and progress for students in Years 12 and 13 has been constrained by a lack of consistent assessment and tracking of progress.

The school cares for and supports its students well. A number of parents who responded to the questionnaire referred to the accessibility of the school and of the ease of contact with staff. The school provides particularly good support to students who are potentially vulnerable as well as tailoring provision for those students whose behaviour might otherwise exclude them from education and examination success.

The curriculum serves the students' needs well. There is good breadth and balance, and the flexibility with which courses are offered in different year groups means that the curriculum is becoming increasingly personalised. The careful transition arrangements with the feeder middle schools ensure students settle in quickly and help teachers build on the knowledge students bring with them. Students in Year 9 told an inspector that it felt as if they had been at the school 'for ever'.

The overall quality of teaching and the use of assessment are satisfactory. Whilst there is an increasing amount of good teaching, the quality is not yet consistent in all subjects. The senior and middle leaders have an accurate and detailed knowledge of the strengths and areas for development of the school and of teaching in particular. There are well-conceived plans of how individual teachers can improve their practice.

The school exploits its partnerships well through its specialist status role and through other networks. The school's formal promotion of community cohesion is less well developed, although the school itself is clearly a cohesive unit and the senior leaders are well aware of the school's rôle in, and impact on, the local and wider community.

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The school is particularly well led by the headteacher, whose focus on improved behaviour, teaching and learning has really moved the school forward and succeeded in raising attainment. He has been well supported by a committed and skilled senior leadership team and, latterly, by the effective curriculum team leaders. This change has not happened overnight and has necessitated concerted hard work from all staff. One teacher commented, 'I am proud to have been part of the journey this school is making.' The strength of the leadership at all levels ensures that the school has good capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue the focus on improved teaching and learning by developing teacher expertise in planning for progress and in assessment.
- Develop a more rigorous approach to the promotion of community cohesion.
- Improve outcomes for students in the sixth form by improving the quality of teaching, assessment and tracking.

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

Students' overall achievement is satisfactory. They make at least sound progress in lessons. The vast majority show an interest in their work, try hard and respond best to lessons where the pace is neither too slow nor too fast. They enjoy active practical learning but are also aware of the need to plan and analyse in subjects such as design technology. Students respond and learn well when tasks are at the right level for them, or are personalised. Higher attaining students are keen to extend their learning and generate ideas. When explanations are unclear, or the pace of the lesson is inappropriate, students can be negative towards their work.

Historically, attainment has been low but over the last three years, it has gradually improved to the point in summer 2009 when the percentage of students attaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics reached 54%. This is a considerable increase with a cohort of students of similar prior attainment to those in former years. The school's data show that the students currently in Years 10 and 11 are on target to continue the upward trend and make at least satisfactory progress.

There is no disparity between the progress made by groups of students. In the past, students identified by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities did not achieve as well as their peers. This is no longer the case. More higher ability students attained the highest grades at GCSE in 2009 but the school is still correctly targeting this group to achieve even better.

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Students say they usually feel safe at school. A small minority of students who returned the questionnaires or who spoke to inspectors say that there are occasions when they do not feel as safe. They told inspectors that this is to do with students congregating in groups in areas in the school grounds. They do, however, say that the school staff are vigilant around the school and monitor behaviour well. They assert that any bullying is dealt with effectively by the school. Students have a good understanding of what constitutes healthy living, acknowledging that not everyone makes use of the healthy option in the school canteen. Students value the school community and large numbers volunteer to hold positions of responsibility, such as on the school council, as guides on open mornings or as head student team members in the sixth form. Students feel that they develop good workplace skills and see the link between the school’s specialism and those skills. They have a good sense of right and wrong and have chances to develop cultural understanding through the curriculum. They understand diversity even if their contact with multi-cultural Britain is limited.

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	3
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	3
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school’s training for staff on teaching and learning, the regular monitoring of classroom practice and the targeted support for individual teachers has led to a rise in the proportion of good teaching. Teachers are managing behaviour well and have good relationships with their students. In the best lessons, these elements are now being exploited well as foundations on which to build improved learning and assessment. In lessons where the focus remains more on behaviour management,

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

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teachers concentrate on task completion rather than on a structured plan for learning with clear and specific learning objectives. The use of assessment to establish what next needs to be learned is still patchy. There is good use of ongoing assessment in mathematics and lesson endings are used well in art to develop students’ use of technical language and to raise expectations of what can be achieved. Marking is very good in some subjects but students report that it is of varying use. The practice of highlighting good features in English work and identifying specific targets gives students a clear idea of what needs to be improved. Teachers use a range of resources and technology is used regularly and appropriately in all classrooms. The school is now focusing on the development of more independent learning. Some small-group and independent learning was observed during the inspection but in a limited range of subjects.

The curriculum has been well designed to meet the needs of a great variety of students. By the end of Year 9, students have embarked upon their examination courses and this gives them, in the words of one student, a ‘head start’. In Years 10 and 11, students take a range of academic and vocational courses or they can receive a programme tailored to their needs. The school’s specialist status has had a positive impact on the increased uptake of business education courses in Years 10 and 11 and on the enterprise activities which involve these students in outreach work in feeder first schools. There is a broad range of well-supported extra-curricular activities, many of which promote team work. The number of students following a modern languages course in Years 10 and 11 is below the national benchmark. The school’s self-evaluation identifies the need for this to be addressed.

The school provides a caring environment which gives good support to all students. The personal, social and health education programme develops well the students’ understanding of issues related to their well-being and their educational choices. The school works effectively with a variety of outside agencies to ensure that students’ needs are met.

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

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher’s clarity of vision of what will take the school forward has been the driving force behind the improvements in outcomes for students. His focus on improving behaviour and on teaching and learning has been relentless and his approach rigorous and long term. He has been effectively supported by, and has exploited well, the varied skills of his senior leadership team. This collaboration has been further strengthened by the development of the role of the curriculum team leaders. This is a significant improvement since the time of the last inspection.

These curriculum team leaders play a key part in ensuring that challenging targets are applied in the context of their subjects. Raising achievement plans in each subject identify objectives for different groups of students and specify exactly how these students will meet their objectives in their work. Regular monitoring of the work of the subject areas ensures that teachers and managers are clearly aware of the progress groups and individuals are making. This helps them intervene in a timely fashion when there is any underachievement.

The governing body has an informed corporate view of the school’s priorities and provides challenge through their committee structure. The governors hold the school well to account through regular reports and they monitor the achievement of all groups. They are working closely with the senior leaders to reduce a sizeable budget deficit and to improve value for money.

The school’s approach to improving achievement is inclusive. It has also taken concerted action to promote equal opportunities on behalf of minority groups of students in the school. The formal promotion of community cohesion by the leadership is not as effective.

Partnerships are cultivated well to ensure that students receive good care and learning opportunities. The headteacher himself plays a leading rôle in developing the 14–19 provision in South Somerset and this brings benefits to the school. The school also engages well with parents and makes effective use of its website as an alternative method of communicating. Communication is regular and of good quality.

All safeguarding regulations and duties are met and arrangements and policies are in line with government requirements and are systematically reviewed.

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	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities	2

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met	
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Outcomes for students in the sixth form are satisfactory. Attainment in external examinations at the end of Years 12 and 13 has been below average in recent years. There was some improvement in the average points score in 2009 but attainment remained below average and the progress the students made over their time in the sixth form still varied too much between subjects. Success in geography has been consistent but it has been the exception.

Students show maturity in lessons and are aware of their responsibility for independent learning although they do admit to finding it difficult to sustain the momentum. Those students who take on positions of responsibilities are highly committed to the school and the younger students. There is a strong sense of team working, particularly in Year 13, and students show initiative in their own enterprise activities, such as setting up a school magazine.

There is an appropriately broad curriculum although the size of the sixth form does pose some constraints on the number and variety of courses which can be offered. As in the main school, teaching is only satisfactory overall as it does not yet consistently have the characteristics that would make it good. The assessment and tracking system has, to date, been variably applied and as a result students have not been fully aware of their progress. This has been recognised by the new director of learning for the sixth form and updated procedures are now in place. These have not yet had time to have an impact.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

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Views of parents and carers

Of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, the large majority showed a good level of satisfaction with the school. Those who wrote positive comments referred to the school as 'supportive' and 'improved'. A few parents felt that there was not a sufficient focus on healthy living. The inspection team felt that the school supported the students sufficiently in staying healthy.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Wadham 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 81 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 643 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	35	43	53	3	3	4	4
The school keeps my child safe	27	33	44	54	5	6	2	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	26	32	39	48	8	9	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	29	41	50	9	11	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	22	27	50	61	5	6	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	23	40	49	10	12	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	20	41	50	13	16	0	0
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)	22	27	39	48	5	6	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	20	24	44	54	6	7	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	22	43	53	6	7	5	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	17	40	49	10	12	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	27	33	38	46	5	6	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	35	40	49	6	7	3	3

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%.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

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>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 pupils' 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.



21 September 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Wadham School, Crewkerne TA18 7NT

Thank you for taking the time to talk to us when we visited your school on 16 and 17 September 2009. We found you very welcoming and willing to share your views with us. We were particularly impressed by the way in which the students in Year 9 had settled into the school.

Wadham is a satisfactory school but one which has improved in many areas since it was last inspected. Examination results have got better and were particularly good in August 2009. All students now make securely satisfactory progress. We felt that you were now taking learning more seriously and we judged your behaviour to be good. We were very pleased to see how much your attendance has improved. It is also now good.

We think that the school provides you with a good curriculum choice. It cares for all of you well and keeps a very careful eye on how you are performing in all your subjects. Your headteacher has been very keen to improve the quality of teaching and has been supported well by the other senior leaders and the subject leaders. Teaching is improving but is not yet consistently good in all subjects. Teachers are working hard to involve you more in your learning and to get you to work more independently. You can help by continuing to behave well and working sensibly on your own or in groups.

We have asked the school to:

- continue to work on improving the quality of teaching and learning, with teachers concentrating on how they plan for you to make progress
- develop further how the school links with the communities of Crewkerne, Ilminster and the villages the school serves, and the wider world
- improve outcomes for students in the sixth form by tracking progress more effectively.

Yours faithfully

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector
(on behalf of the inspection team)

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