

Woodchurch High School Engineering College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105095
Local Authority	Wirral
Inspection number	308767
Inspection date	18 March 2008
Reporting inspector	John Ashton

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1292
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Kevin Mighall
Headteacher	Mrs B Holt
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2005
School address	Carr Bridge Road Woodchurch Wirral Merseyside CH49 7NG
Telephone number	0151 6775257
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the quality of teaching and learning and how this relates to the relative progress of pupils across the school; leadership and management, including the impact of specialist college status; how well Every Child Matters themes have been integrated into the school's pastoral systems; and the school's particular strengths in caring for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for looked-after children. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, its own assessment records and from national assessment data. Reports to governors were examined along with a range of pupils' written work. There were interviews with senior members of staff, pupils from the school forum, governors and a senior officer from the local authority. We visited a number of lessons and analysed the information contained in the inspection questionnaires parents returned. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that its own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This larger than average school serves an area of high social and economic disadvantage. Around 98% of its pupils are White British in origin. Very small numbers of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and no pupil is at an early stage of learning English. There is a good level of pupil stability; few pupils enter or leave school other than at the beginning or end of the academic year. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is almost twice the national average. Woodchurch is a non-selective school in an authority that sends a large proportion of its pupils to grammar schools. A broadly average proportion of pupils are on the special educational needs register, but more than twice the national average have a statement of special educational need. This partly reflects the fact that the school houses a designated unit for pupils with autism and makes specialist provision for pupils with physical impairment. Amongst the other pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, the predominant needs are for social, emotional or behavioural support or for help with moderate learning difficulties. The school has numerous awards, including the International Schools Award. It has Investors in People accreditation and has held Beacon School status for inclusion since 2000. It gained Engineering College status in 2002 and renewed this in 2007. There are detailed plans for the school to move into newly built premises on an adjacent site within the next two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Woodchurch High School provides an outstanding quality of education for its pupils.

It has significant strengths across all areas but especially in the outstanding achievement of its pupils, their excellent personal development, and the exceptional provision for their well-being, care and guidance. All of this is brought about by the high proportion of effective teaching and exemplary leadership and management.

The 2007 GCSE results were close to the national average and the school's highest ever. For example, the proportion of pupils achieving at least five GCSE grades A* to C (including both mathematics and English) was broadly average. The proportions of pupils achieving at least five A* to G grades and at least one A* to G grade were above average. Almost every pupil achieved at least one grade C at GCSE. All of this adds up to outstanding progress from the pupils' below average starting points on entry to the school, and is the result of very good teaching and excellent leadership and management. The results in some subjects were particularly good - for example, the biology part of the triple science courses, especially for the girls; the sports studies results, especially for the boys; and the information and communication technology (ICT) results for both boys and girls. Pupils achieve exceptionally well from their starting points to the end of Key Stage 4, although standards at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 are below average.

The quality of teaching is mostly good across the school, with a significant minority of outstanding teaching and just a small proportion of teaching that is satisfactory rather than good. Recent staff turnover has led to the appointment of a large number of newly qualified staff but their well managed induction to the school and thorough ongoing professional development makes it hard to tell that they are new to teaching. Typical strengths of the teaching seen are the good quality planning, including very clear learning objectives, so that pupils know exactly what they are expected to do. The expectations of pupils are high and they are seen to rise well to the challenge and achieve accordingly.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils' behaviour both in and out of lessons and their attitudes to learning are excellent. Attendance levels are above average. Pupils feel safe and confident that any difficulties will be picked up and dealt with promptly and effectively. They see the staff as the principal strength of the school. Relationships are very secure. Lessons are interesting and learning is enjoyable. This contributes to their outstanding progress and achievement. Pupils understand the importance of exercise in a healthy lifestyle. The school provides a good selection of opportunities for pupils' participation. The school's sporting successes reflect this. Pupils contribute very well to the school and wider communities, aware of the needs of others. They show care in their attitudes towards others in and around the school. Pupils eagerly take on responsibility and contribute much to the school and wider community, working with the elderly and with primary school pupils. They are confident that they have a strong voice in all aspects of school affairs. They are also linked to enterprise activities which raise money for local and international charities. Their well-developed literacy, numeracy and ICT skills prepare them effectively for the next stage of their lives.

The school's provision to meet the diverse needs of pupils is exceptional. The curriculum is outstanding. It is thoroughly inclusive, flexible and makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those who are

gifted or talented, are very well served. For example there is early GCSE entry for high flyers. Curricular development is based on a thorough analysis of pupils' learning needs and aspirations. The good impact of the engineering specialism is reflected well in the strength of vocational education. Curriculum review identifies what is working effectively and what is not. The impact of innovation is evaluated and modified in the light of review. The impact of the school's specialist status is very well established, not just in the school's focus subjects of mathematics, science, technology and ICT, but also across the rest of the school. For example, the increasingly strong industrial links have broadened pupils' aspirations and opportunities. There is excellent enrichment of the curriculum, much of it derived from specialist studies and links with business, industry and other agencies. All of this makes a significant contribution to pupils' skill development.

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its pupils. Safeguarding arrangements meet current government guidelines. Academic monitoring is instrumental in promoting high achievement because pupils know their targets and what to do to improve. They know how well they are doing and how well they should be doing. The very effective targeted support in class and thorough intervention arrangements enable pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to cope and make similar progress to classmates. Excellent sensitive support enables full participation in lessons. Records of pupils' progress are efficiently kept. Pupils who need them have individual education plans of good quality. Pupils say they receive excellent advice on option and career choices. Excellent monitoring systems mean that any decline is picked up quickly and remedial intervention put in place.

The vast majority of parents are very happy with the school. Typical positive comments are, 'The staff are exceptional and strive to get the best out of our children, the pupils couldn't have gone to a more supportive school. It motivates and encourages its pupils to succeed in everything they do and definitely lives up to its outstanding reputation.' Pupils told inspectors that they feel valued as individuals because the staff know and support them so well. They feel that the curriculum meets their needs in its variety of subjects and qualifications.

The excellent quality of the leadership and management of the school is a central reason for the school's continued success. School development planning is of very good quality. The school's self-evaluation is both accurate and effective. Governance is particularly strong, ensuring that finances are healthy. The school has an excellent capacity for improving even further and gives outstanding value for money. A key factor is the well established and widely respected headteacher, who is highly regarded by all who work with her for her professional, methodical, inspirational, analytical and caring approach. The headteacher's success in instilling a child-focused approach among all staff helps to explain why the school continues to be as successful and popular with parents and pupils as it has been for many years. Above all, what the school does best is develop pupils' confidence in themselves. This is a priceless gift to give its pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no significant areas for improvement.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

Thank you for making us feel so welcome on our recent visit to inspect your school. We especially enjoyed meeting members of the school forum, all of whom are first rate ambassadors for your school.

I can see why you are so proud of Woodchurch High. It provides you with an excellent all-round education. You told us that you think the school's best feature is the quality of its staff. We were impressed too by how positive your attitudes to learning are, how much is expected of you all and how hard you strive to achieve the best you can. The care, guidance and support you receive and the breadth of opportunities you have are all exceptionally good, and the school's leadership and management are excellent.

We were also impressed with the latest GCSE results, the school's best ever, and understand that the current Year 11 are on track to at least equal them, if they keep working hard.

There are no specific areas for improvement for your school this time.

We think the most priceless thing your school does for you is in the way it develops your self-confidence. We hope you make the best use of this as a foundation for even greater success in the next stage of your careers.

All the very best for continued success in the future.