

Wexham School

Norway Drive, Slough, Berkshire SL2 5QP

Inspection dates

21 and 28–29 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- In just two years, the headteacher successfully tackled weaknesses which had developed since the previous inspection. He made sure that behaviour and teaching improved. Pupils and sixth-form students now make good progress.
- Governors are knowledgeable about the school community and totally support the headteacher's work and his values.
- The astute and realistic headteacher and senior leaders knew that a unique blend of factors, some beyond the school's control, would generate disappointing GCSE results in 2017. Inspectors explored the factors in depth to be confident that they were one-off results.
- In nearly all lessons and subjects, sixth-form students and pupils concentrate, work hard and make good progress. They are sensible, considerate of others, and get on well together and with staff. They respect the diversity of their backgrounds and lifestyles.
- The curriculum and subject options are now better matched to pupils' abilities, interests and aspirations. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the rich range of extra-curricular activities.
- More-accurate assessment of pupils' work has led to sharper learning. Disadvantaged pupils now make close to or better progress than others. In several subjects, the most able pupils achieve very well.
- A valuable feature of pupils' and students' learning is the breadth of insight and sensitivity they acquire about the world around them. Pupils are introduced to, and discuss, potentially controversial topics such as radicalisation and sexual exploitation.
- Parents and staff are rightly confident that pupils are safe; pupils confirm that they feel safe. All staff, especially the pastoral team, provide exceptionally thoughtful care for all pupils and students.
- Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, including those in the autistic spectrum disorder resource base, receive the best possible physical, educational and emotional support to flourish.
- Sixth-form students mature into thoughtful young adults, and practically all of them move onto worthwhile study, training or employment. Their progress is not as good in academic subjects as it is in vocational ones.
- Recently appointed staff are contributing to better learning in the few subjects where progress was too slow in the past.
- Pupils' handwriting can be hard to read and some of them find it difficult to write at length. They have limited confidence and experience of how to interpret experiments in science, or tackle and solve mathematical problems.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve learning and progress by increasing pupils' and students':
 - confidence to carry out and interpret practical experiments in science
 - practice in problem-solving exercises in mathematics
 - ability to write legible and well-structured, detailed paragraphs
 - progress in subjects, particularly academic ones, in the sixth form, where examination results have been relatively weak.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- On taking up his post the headteacher quickly identified what needed to be improved, particularly reorganising the school's finances, eliminating poor teaching, sharpening up health and safety procedures and improving pupils' behaviour. Over the last two years, he has sensitively and successfully tackled all these issues.
- By the beginning of September 2017, adjustments to the senior leadership team were complete. The team is made up of both new and long-standing members of staff who work extremely well together and contribute much to the school's many successful features. Recruitment in the area is not easy, so other staffing issues are not fully resolved but the headteacher is skilful at appointing the talented teachers the school needs.
- Nevertheless, senior leaders know that a few teachers need support to generate the best possible learning for all pupils. Professional development for staff is well considered and effective. They are supported and encouraged to visit other schools and/or to become GCSE and/or sixth-form examiners. Senior leaders value external scrutiny and advice about their work, recently organising a three-day review about the accuracy of the school's key stage 3 assessment scheme and how well it contributes to better progress.
- Staff morale is high. Almost 100% of those who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire feel challenged and encouraged to improve their practice and are proud to be members of staff. Many of them commented about the stability the headteacher has generated, the clarity of his expectations for behaviour and the purposeful atmosphere around the school. One wrote on the questionnaire that, 'there is clear consultation on a range of issues'.
- The school receives substantial additional funds for disadvantaged pupils and those in Year 7 needing to improve their reading and mathematics. Senior leaders adapt the allocation of these funds thoughtfully. In 2016/17 a consultant worked with the most able disadvantaged pupils, and their enthusiasm for learning and the quality of their work improved considerably. Spending funds to have a well-run and stimulating library, along with rewards for 'superstar readers' and 'word millionaires', was a good investment for pupils at this school; younger pupils' reading ages went up in leaps and bounds.
- Many integrated elements of the curriculum contribute to the school's excellent work to prepare pupils for their lives beyond school. Assemblies cover important topics in an interesting and informative style. A presentation on the charity Water Aid linked kindness with reflection on what it means to be charitable, consideration of inequalities, and how the school's community impacts on the rest of the world.
- Weekly religious education, and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons cover an extremely wide range of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. At the same time they incorporate an insight into British values and citizenship. Pupils are complimentary about these lessons. During the inspection, inspectors saw pupils learning about topics including mental health, drugs and cyber-bullying. Discussing

assemblies that they had found interesting, Year 7 pupils described ones on Black History Month, the Salvation Army and road safety.

- Pupils now in Years 9 and 10 chose their GCSE option subjects by the end of Year 8; 60% of Year 9 pupils are studying all the English Baccalaureate subjects. Wise changes to the curriculum have raised pupils' aspirations at the same time as giving them more choice in what option subjects they can study for GCSE; they rarely have to study subjects in which they have little interest.
- The range of extra-curricular activities (particularly popular in key stage 3), is another strength of the curriculum. The school understands that it is not always easy for some pupils, especially girls, to stay after school, and has lengthened the lunch break so that there is time to include a few additional activities for them.

Governance of the school

- Governors rightly describe the school as aspirational, rapidly improving and socially cohesive. They are pleased that disadvantaged pupils now make fairly similar progress to others, that boys' progress relative to girls has improved, and that pupils with SEN and/or disabilities do well from their starting points.
- Senior leaders are aware of the minority ethnic groups that do not do as well as others, and share this with governors. Together, governors and leaders appreciate the sensitivity required to reduce these differences. Governors visit the school to see things for themselves and receive presentations from subject leaders to keep them informed about developments.
- All members of the governing body are as keen as the headteacher for parents to be fully involved in their children's education. A school community outreach worker appointed by the headteacher supports parents, for example by interpreting information for them if they lack fluency in English.
- The chair of the governing body is keen to recruit new members, particularly parents, so that the board has enough members for sub-committees to function efficiently. The chair is considering ways to strengthen the membership and expertise.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. A knowledgeable and experienced deputy headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead, is very well supported by a deputy and a full-time child protection officer. All staff are trained and brought up to date regularly, and key players are qualified to high levels.
- All staff know the signs that might suggest things are not quite right for a child and always contact the safeguarding leaders with any worries. A newly qualified teacher confirmed the importance given to staff being alert to safeguarding by describing the training as 'relentless'. Pastoral leaders feel their training is 'comprehensive'.
- Attendance staff respond to unexplained absence immediately and take action when they have concerns. They do not shy away from involving social services when necessary and will implement determined action to put the safety of a child before

anything else. They keep a vigilant eye on children looked after and those with high-level learning and personal needs.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- In the last two years, dedicated and experienced staff have been joined by several new teachers and subject leaders. They are all keen to help pupils to learn well and enjoy their lessons. School data and work seen during the inspection support senior leaders' confidence that consistency in the quality of teaching and learning is now evident in all years.
- Middle leaders now analyse examination outcomes to identify where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding, and adjust their teaching plans accordingly. The new head of science, appointed in September 2017, is galvanising the department to improve pupils' practical skills and analyses of experiments. The head of mathematics is concentrating on regular problem-solving, starting in Year 7, so that pupils develop confidence to answer this style of question. The head of English is working on improving pupils' confidence in their writing and revision techniques.
- The majority of teachers know which pupils may need extra support or which ones find it hard to concentrate. They realise that the pace and content of lessons must match the range of abilities in a class. Nevertheless, there were a few lessons during the inspection where all pupils were given exactly the same work. As a few of them found it too difficult to get started and/or the most able pupils found it too easy, learning and progress were held back.
- Pupils respond well in lessons involving interesting resources, for example pictures, journalism and videos in the humanities. They commented that they appreciate going through examples in clear steps, such as constructing sentences after discussing vocabulary. They also find it helpful to understand a new topic by answering progressively more difficult questions. They work sensibly in groups when asked to evaluate each other's work. Pupils say that they know how well they are doing in most subjects but are not always clear what they should do to get better.
- Extremely well-prepared PSHE lessons based on up-to-date resources are delivered by form tutors with enthusiasm and sensitivity. Pupils rate these lessons highly and find them useful and informative. They can see how the topics are relevant to their present and future lives.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language, some of whom arrive from overseas with no more than a few words of English, are taught by experienced and skilful teachers. They make rapid progress and join in mainstream lessons as quickly as possible.
- Teaching assistants looking after pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, including those working one-to-one with resource-base pupils with autistic spectrum disorder in mainstream lessons, give strong support. They show pupils how to get the most out of lessons and know when to support, or when to step back and encourage them to work independently.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Emotional and practical kindness drives the school's care for all its pupils and students. The nurture for pupils who face difficult situations at home or have personal, health and learning needs is exemplary.
- The oversight of pupils' medical needs is thorough and staff are fully alert to keeping an eye open for pupils with mental health issues. All the pupils inspectors met said they knew more than one member of staff they would speak to if they had any personal worries, or concerns about another pupil.
- Pupils' welfare is overseen by many staff and support staff who liaise extremely well together so that no pupil slips through the net. All members of the safeguarding, pastoral and SEN teams keep in touch regularly so they can, when necessary, deal with any issues before they escalate. The virtual-school headteacher, supporting children looked after for the local authority, has praised the ethos of the school, appreciating that the 'needs of the vulnerable are embedded in practice'.
- The PSHE programme educates pupils about how they can lead safe, considerate and responsible lives. They are fully aware of the damage and upset that social media and cyber-bullying can generate. They learn about different lifestyles, different family structures and the importance of respecting and valuing different religious views and backgrounds.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils concentrated and worked hard in most of the lessons seen during the inspection. They did not always participate with enthusiasm or focus but only on rare occasions did a few of them distract others from learning.
- Attendance was below average when the headteacher took up post but it has improved in the last two years and now fluctuates around average for practically all groups. About one third of the 2017 Year 11 cohort had been persistent absentees when they were in Year 10. The present Year 11 pupils attend well and are determined to achieve the best they can in their GCSE examinations.
- When expectations for behaviour were tightened up, the number of fixed-term exclusions went up. They have dropped in recent months. Pupils acknowledge that bullying does happen but describe it as rare and say that it is tackled firmly. During break and lunch, the atmosphere around the school is calm, with pupils from different backgrounds socialising well together.
- The very few pupils being educated full time, off site at the Haybrook centre make good progress in their chosen courses. Their behaviour, social skills and confidence develop well. The school receives termly reports, and the headteacher visits Haybrook to see how the pupils are getting on and to keep in touch with the staff there.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Current pupils, whatever their starting points or particular learning needs, are making good progress in many subjects. They enter the school with well-below-average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Their reading improves rapidly in Years 7 and 8. They use a wide range of interesting resources which strengthen their reading fluency, comprehension and enjoyment of books.
- Since the previous inspection, pupils' GCSE results in English and mathematics reflected progress from Year 7 which was close to or above that seen nationally. Despite overall progress in English and mathematics dropping slightly in 2017, one in five pupils achieved a strong pass, level 5 and above, in both these subjects in 2017.
- As in previous years, in 2017 the most able pupils who took the three separate sciences achieved well above national average results. Pupils who took two science qualifications did not do well, partly because they had only done a few science experiments in the past. GCSE results in mathematics revealed that pupils were not good at problem-solving.
- In all years, the gap between boys' and girls' progress has narrowed, and differences between disadvantaged pupils' progress and that made by other pupils have narrowed or disappeared, particularly in Years 7 to 9. In 2017, progress by disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils was strengthened by specific actions leaders took to develop their learning.
- In his report to governors, the headteacher wrote that the 2017 results were 'disappointing but sadly not unexpected'. He realised that many of these Year 11 pupils had entered the school with extremely low self-esteem and little interest in school life or education. The head of English observed that a group of pupils within this year group appeared to be 'emotional, immature and saw themselves as failures'. They had received a variable quality of teaching and pastoral care in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, despite small improvements, their behaviour and attendance were poor. Many of them were not receptive to leaders' and teachers' best efforts to help them.
- The headteacher was not in post when all these pupils were made to take key stage 4 courses in creative arts and technology – an unpopular curriculum decision. Over a quarter of them failed to complete the required coursework or did not turn up for the examination in these, and sometimes other, subjects. This alone had an enormous negative impact on the 2017 headline progress measures.
- Pupils in the autistic spectrum disorder resource base make at least as good progress as others because they attend mainstream lessons with teaching assistants who know them well and understand exactly the type of guidance they need. In the base, pupils learn practical skills, such as cooking or how to get around the local area safely. There is a 'chill-out' area if any of the pupils feel they need a space in which they can be calm.
- Despite the disappointing outcomes in 2017, practically all pupils were then guided towards worthwhile courses elsewhere or in the school's sixth form. The school's reputation for having a below-average proportion of pupils not in education or training remained intact.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Inspectors met several Year 12 pupils who had taken their GCSEs at the school in 2017. Those who had underachieved were reflective about their behaviour in Years 10 and 11. They acknowledged that they were to blame for not working hard enough and not achieving well in their examinations. They were most appreciative that they had been allowed to stay on into the sixth form by following a bridging course and retaking their GCSEs in English and mathematics.
- A strength of the sixth form is that students are supported and encouraged to develop the confidence and maturity they will need when they move on after two or three years. For students from overseas, some of whom need to improve their English, the school provides all essential support and guidance. An above-national proportion of students are in education, training or employment after leaving, something that the headteacher rightly believes to be an important outcome.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form moved into a higher gear in recent months. Sharper monitoring of students' progress and external support and advice have generated higher standards, for example in biology and chemistry. Other strategies are helping to diminish differences between disadvantaged and other students' achievement and to teach students general examination skills.
- Work-related and technical-course results dipped in 2016 but recovered to be broadly average in 2017. Students mainly choose courses at level 2 or level 3 in business studies, science, sports and computer use. The most popular academic subjects are sociology and psychology.
- To match students' abilities and future plans, leaders are extending the range of work-related courses in the curriculum. As in the main school, students discuss a wide range of topical and important issues in their PSHE education lessons alongside wide-ranging careers advice and guidance. Students are encouraged to visit apprenticeship fairs and university open days to consider future careers. An enrichment programme one afternoon a week includes discussions about films and politics. Duke of Edinburgh's Awards were introduced recently.
- Sixth-form mentors are very good role models for younger pupils, helping them with their reading and contributing to the school's wide-ranging and popular sports activities. Students are involved in fundraising and helping in the local community, visiting a local care home, for example. This term they are supporting Year 8 pupils who are contributing to a borough-wide awareness day on child sexual exploitation.
- Current sixth formers in both Years 12 and 13 are working hard and making good progress. They are taught well and appreciate teachers' clear guidance on examination skills. They understand that if they read about a topic being studied on their own they have more time to discuss it with teachers and to master related skills in lessons.
- One sixth-form student described the A-level teachers as 'amazing', and many of them noted how willing teachers are to give them extra help. Asked how they would improve the school they could only ask for a common room and observe that leaders should 'take out the few pupils who do not buy into the ethos'!

- Students who did not attain a pass level in GCSE English and or mathematics are taught well and their confidence increases. The school's success rate for pupils retaking these subjects has been well above that seen nationally for several years.
- The Years 12 and 13 retention rate and the completion of study programmes are strong. In 2017, over three quarters of students went on to university, and practically all the others into work or apprenticeships.

School details

Unique reference number	110078
Local authority	Slough
Inspection number	10036914

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	788
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	142
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Ward
Headteacher	Lawrence Smith
Telephone number	01753 526797
Website	www.wexhamschool.co.uk
Email address	post@wexham.slough.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 September 2013

Information about this school

- The school is set to expand to become an eight-form-entry school in 2018. A large building is already being constructed on site. At present, it is smaller than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- Boys outnumber girls in all years, particularly in Year 9 where over three quarters of the pupils are boys. The school is a non-selective school in a selective local authority.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above average and close to 50% in several year groups.

- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is average although it varies considerably between year groups. The school has a local-authority funded specialist resource base for pupils who have an education, health and care plan for autistic spectrum disorder.
- A very small number of Year 11 pupils are educated full time, off site, at Haybrook College. They follow a 'Springboard' course which includes studies towards some GCSE examinations.
- Each year, around 40 Year 7 pupils qualify for catch-up funding, which is for pupils who did not attain the expected standards in English and/or mathematics at the end of primary school.
- The number of children looked after fluctuates but is often high compared to most secondary schools.
- The majority of pupils and students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Close to 60% of pupils are from Asian or Asian British heritages, most of whom are Pakistani. About 30% of pupils speak English as an additional language but the majority of these pupils speak English fluently.
- The proportion of pupils who enter or leave the school during Years 7 to 11 is above that seen nationally. Since September 2017, for example, 25 pupils have joined the school, most of whom went into Years 8 and 9.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school met the 2016 government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Many of the inspectors' visits to lessons to observe teaching and learning were carried out with a member of the senior leadership team. Several of these lessons were visited for a short time in order to see as many subjects as possible and see all year groups at work. Inspectors looked at pupils' books in lessons.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils and students when possible during lessons and met them informally as they visited parts of the school during break and lunch. They held meetings with groups of pupils from several year groups and met many other pupils during visits to the SEN department, including the resource base for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, and the nurture room.
- Discussions were held with staff and most senior and middle leaders. Inspectors met the chair of the governing body twice, once with two other governors. Telephone conversations were held with two representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors took into account 62 staff questionnaire responses but the very small number of responses to Parent View (less than 5%) was not representative. Inspectors examined the responses to parent and pupil questionnaires arranged by the school.

Inspection team

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