

Wycombe High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136723
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	397478
Inspection dates	27–28 June 2012
Lead inspector	John Meinke

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,330
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	409
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Letheren
Headteacher	Sharon Cromie
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 April 2007
School address	Marlow Road High Wycombe HP11 1TB
Telephone number	01494 523961
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Email address	office@whs.bucks.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

John Meinke	Seconded inspector
Martin Marsh	Additional inspector
Caroline Pardy	Additional inspector
Gill Walley	Additional inspector
Paul Williams	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. During the inspection, joint observations were conducted with members of the school's senior leadership team and a total of 42 lessons, taught by 42 teachers, were seen. Inspectors also undertook a number of learning walks to gather additional evidence. Meetings were held with students, members of the governing body and school leaders. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the responses to 133 parental questionnaires as well as responses to student and staff questionnaires. Other documentation, including the school's data on performance, its self-evaluation, governing body minutes and key policies, was scrutinised.

Information about the school

Wycombe High School is a larger than average-sized secondary school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very low. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is higher than that found nationally. The largest heritage groups represented in the school are White British and Pakistani. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is higher than that found nationally. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is very low. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing and holds the Artsmark Gold Award, Healthy Schools Award, Investors in People Award, NACE Challenge Award and the Sportsmark Award. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

The current headteacher was appointed from 1 January 2009. The school converted to academy status on 1 May 2011.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school. Students make outstanding progress across all key stages and attainment is well above national averages.
- The sixth form is outstanding. The strong focus on the development of students' independent learning skills and careful matching of provision to individual needs ensure that attainment is above the national average.
- Teaching is highly effective in meeting the needs of learners and promoting rapid and sustained progress. Teachers use their expertise and excellent subject knowledge to plan lessons which engage students. Students demonstrate great enthusiasm for learning and show a high degree of ownership of their learning. The quality of teaching is outstanding.
- Behaviour both in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Students take responsibility for their excellent behaviour, supported by the school's clearly communicated high expectations and the many opportunities provided for student leadership. There is a clear commitment to the development of the whole child and the school provides outstanding opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students are exceptionally well prepared for the next stages in their education or employment. Attendance is very high and well above the national average.
- The leadership and management of the headteacher, leaders across the school and the governing body, are outstanding. The clearly communicated ambition for all students to reach the very highest standards and relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching mean that the school is not content to rest on its laurels. Arrangements for the management of performance are robust and have contributed strongly to improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to share and disseminate best practice in order to further build on the outstanding teaching observed during the inspection, including:
 - the highly effective differentiation seen in outstanding lessons which further promotes students' independent learning
 - the exemplary assessment, marking and feedback that take place in many subjects and key stages, and which ensure students are fully aware of how to progress in their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Lesson observations, scrutiny of past and present work and discussions with students and staff indicate that students learn exceptionally well. Students demonstrate great enthusiasm for learning and show a high degree of ownership of their learning. They tackle even the most challenging of problems with enthusiasm and vigour. In an outstanding A-level physics lesson, students demonstrated great resilience when tackling a challenging practical activity, collaborating with each other to solve problems rather than relying on the teacher. Students work together to support each other's learning very well. During a business and enterprise activity students worked together in teams with individual roles and responsibilities to successfully complete a competitive task to a tight deadline.

Students join the school with higher than average prior attainment. They make outstanding progress and attain very high standards which are well above national averages at the end of both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. Rigorous monitoring of assessment information, along with a range of highly effective intervention strategies, ensures that all groups of students, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, make rapid and sustained progress. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire indicated that their daughter was making good progress at the school and inspectors agree.

Achievement in English and mathematics is outstanding. Literacy and numeracy are promoted across the curriculum through a wide range of activities and teachers make very good use of opportunities to promote them during lessons through use of key words and technical language, questioning and discussion work and use of data and calculations. For example, in an A-level history lesson data and maps were used as evidence when exploring ideas about Calvinism in 16th century France. There is effective intervention for any students who enter the school with literacy or numeracy skills which are at lower than expected levels and a strong focus on conversation skills and the development of vocabulary means that students are confident and articulate. Students are exceptionally well prepared for the next stages in their education, training or employment.

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Quality of teaching

Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge and expertise to plan lessons which have clear learning objectives and well-planned activities that engage and enthuse learners, including disabled students and those with special educational needs. Teachers have high expectations and set demanding tasks to which students respond with determination. Lessons proceed at a rapid pace with no time wasted. For example, in a Year 9 music lesson students analysed a composition using technical language with precision. The teacher challenged students to answer an examination question to the highest standard, continually prompting them to develop and improve their ideas. Questioning is used well to challenge students and check understanding. Verbal feedback during lessons, including peer-assessment, is a strength, and a characteristic of many of the best lessons observed was dialogue of a very high quality between teachers and students and students and students. For example, in an A-level biology lesson students gave presentations about a practical investigation they had carried out independently. Scientific language was used accurately, data were presented and analysed well and they had evaluated their work in depth. Their peers gave sophisticated feedback as to how they could further improve their work.

The vast majority of parents and carers indicated that their daughter is well taught and inspectors agree. There is widespread evidence of exemplary practice in assessment, marking and feedback which enables students to explicitly know the next steps that they need to take in their learning. The school aims to further share and embed the outstanding practice seen in many subjects and key stages across the whole school. The curriculum has been carefully planned to meet the needs of learners and it provides excellent opportunities for students to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally, including through assemblies, trips and visits, clubs and events and a programme of activity and focus days.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

'We would not have wished for our daughter to go to any other school; Wycombe High is perfect for her.' This comment reflects the very positive views expressed by parents and carers through the inspection questionnaires. The vast majority of parents and carers indicated that their daughter felt safe at school and students and the inspection team agree. The school provides a safe and calm atmosphere for learning where all students thrive. Students are polite, courteous and confident. They take responsibility for their behaviour, encouraged by the high expectations and aspirations communicated by staff and the many opportunities students have to lead and manage their own behaviour. These opportunities include peer mentoring and subject support offered by sixth form students to younger girls. Older students, especially sixth form students, provide excellent role models and the school has developed this further through the recent introduction of a vertical tutoring system.

Students have a good awareness of the different types of bullying and they know how to keep themselves and others safe. Incidences of bullying are very rare and

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school records indicate that the very few incidences that have happened were dealt with extremely effectively. Almost all parents, carers and students who responded to the inspection questionnaire indicated that behaviour is good and lessons are not disrupted; inspectors agree and the exemplary behaviour seen during the inspection is typical of that over time. A significant strength of the school, commented on by a number of students and parents, is the high quality of pastoral care. Students are known and cared for as individuals and students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are extremely well supported.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and leaders across the school, along with the governing body, have ambitions for all students to achieve the very highest standards and leave the school as confident young adults. They have rightly prioritised ensuring that the quality of teaching is outstanding as key to achieving this. Self-evaluation is very accurate and informs decisive improvement planning which is focused on improving students' experience at the school. The governing body works strategically and highly effectively to support and challenge the school. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary and fully meet government requirements. The capacity for continued improvement is very strong.

Leaders at all levels have a good understanding of the strengths of teaching and decisive actions have been taken to eradicate weaknesses. Performance management is robust and ensures accountability. An extensive programme of coaching and training, including opportunities to share good practice across schools, supports staff development.

The curriculum is regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure that it always meets the needs of learners. While promoting the highest academic standards, the curriculum has also been designed to promote the love of learning. For example, in Key Stage 4, a programme of study has been designed to develop students' wider skills and interests and balance the demanding academic curriculum. The sixth form curriculum has recently been reviewed to ensure that it is highly personalised to meet the needs of all learners, including those who aspire to progress to employment and training, as well as support those wishing to progress to university and higher education. There is a commitment to the holistic development of the whole child supported by an extensive enrichment programme of clubs, trips and visits, including international trips, performing arts and sporting events and well-planned activity days.

The school promotes equality and tackles discrimination well. Assessment information is carefully monitored by school leaders to ensure that all groups of students and individual learners make rapid and sustained progress. Relationships between students are harmonious and the introduction of vertical tutoring has further promoted socialising between age groups. There are many opportunities for students to explore different beliefs, religions and cultures through both the planned curriculum and enrichment programme. The school works hard to engage with

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parents and carers through half-termly reporting, parent/carer conferences and parent/carer evenings.

Glossary

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

29 June 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Wycombe High School, High Wycombe HP11 1TB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and seeing your work. The inspectors think that your school provides you with an outstanding education and prepares you very well for your futures.

- You make outstanding progress and reach very high standards of attainment, which are well above national averages, at the end of Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. This prepares you brilliantly for later life.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers plan lessons with activities which engage and challenge you. You show great enthusiasm for learning and respond with enthusiasm, determination and resilience. You work very well together and your collaboration and support for each other are strengths.
- You told us that behaviour is very good in the school and that you feel safe and we agree. We think your behaviour is exemplary. The high expectations of staff support you to lead and manage your own behaviour well. You demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning and contribute well to a calm, purposeful environment where you can thrive. Older students, especially sixth form students, provide excellent role models for younger students.
- Your parents, carers and many of you commented on the very good pastoral care that you receive and indicate that the school supports you well as individuals. The school provides you with many opportunities for personal development beyond the academic curriculum and helps you to develop your understanding of different beliefs, religions and cultures.
- The headteacher, school leaders and staff across the school are not complacent and want to improve the school further so that you continue to achieve the very highest standards you can. This includes the further development of the already outstanding teaching. We have asked the school to ensure that the very best practice in teaching and marking and feedback are further shared and developed across the school.

We wish you all at Wycombe High School a happy and successful future. Keep up your excellent contributions to the running of the school.

Yours sincerely

John Meinke

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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