

Writhlington School

Knobsbury Lane, Writhlington, Radstock, Somerset BA3 3NQ

Inspection dates

17–18 January 2017

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' achievement over time has not been good enough. Pupils currently in school do not make consistently strong progress from their starting points in a range of subjects.
- The quality of teaching varies too much both between different year groups and within subjects. Although standards are rising, the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and of the most able is not improving as quickly as that of other pupils.
- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement because teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' work are too low. This limits pupils' aspirations and the progress that they make.
- Some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not clearly identified and their progress is not monitored closely.
- The academic targets that senior leaders set for pupils are not used effectively in the classroom to enable pupils to make good progress. Pupils are often unaware of their targets and some teachers are not confident about using them.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes require improvement because attainment is not good enough in some subjects. Leaders do not ensure that students follow study programmes appropriate to their individual needs.
- Senior leaders have had an over-generous view of the school's performance. Changes to leadership teams at all levels in the school have resulted in increased capacity for improvement but have not yet had time to have an impact.
- Governors do not evaluate outcomes thoroughly enough to be able to challenge senior leaders robustly.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders and teachers have created a positive learning environment in most classes which makes a strong contribution to pupils' confidence and enjoyment of school. Good use is made of the school's excellent facilities.
- Governors are committed to the school and to further improvement.
- Pupils and students have access to a comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities and most take advantage of the many opportunities offered to them.
- Pupils behave well around the school. They are polite and courteous towards adults and each other.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers plan lessons that more consistently meet the needs of pupils, including the most able, disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - making sure that pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their learning further.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the monitoring of teaching considers fully the progress pupils make
 - embedding sufficient challenge and high expectations across the curriculum
 - identifying more effectively pupils who need support and providing appropriate interventions that enable them to make faster progress
 - enabling teachers to use information about how well pupils are doing more effectively when planning learning
 - governors evaluating robustly the impact of actions taken by senior and middle leaders on raising pupils' achievement in order to hold them rigorously to account.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Although senior leaders are working hard to improve the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' progress, the pace of change has not been rapid enough to raise standards of attainment across the school. There is too much inconsistency in the quality of teaching across the school.
- Senior leaders and governors have been over-generous in their assessment of the quality of education provided by the school and in the attainment of pupils and students. Consequently, weaknesses have not been resolved quickly enough.
- Recent changes in the leadership of the school have ensured that the new team has a broad range of skills and is strongly committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning. The new team has not had sufficient time, however, to ensure that improvements are fully embedded in classroom practice.
- Leaders and governors have successfully created a positive learning environment that supports pupils' personal development and enhances their physical and emotional well-being. Its effect is yet to be felt in all classes, however.
- Leaders have introduced new systems for setting targets for pupils and tracking their progress. These have not yet been effective in raising achievement as not all subject leaders check closely enough to see that teachers' assessments are consistent with the quality and level of pupils' work. Teachers do not understand clearly the targets set for pupils and how these are generated.
- In recent years, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has been poor when compared with the progress of other pupils nationally. Steps are now in place to reverse this trend through more careful use of the pupil premium and Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up funding. However, the progress of all groups of pupils is not monitored closely enough to ensure that action is taken quickly to help pupils catch up.
- The identification of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not robust enough to ensure that the support put in place for some of those who need it is wholly effective.
- The curriculum has undergone significant change in recent years as the school has moved from predominantly offering vocational courses to more academic ones. This has resulted in some turbulence which has had a negative impact on the progress of pupils. The new curriculum is broad and balanced and it offers a much better range of options to suit individual needs.
- The leadership team has worked hard to ensure that behaviour in the school is good and pupils speak positively of the changes that have been made.
- Pupils enjoy strong personal support and they say that they feel well cared for. Arrangements for the teaching of personal, social and health education, however, are currently underdeveloped. As a result, pupils' knowledge of topics such as drug misuse and sex and relationship education is fragmented. Leaders are aware of the problem and plans are in place to ensure that the subject is taught more effectively.

- Leadership of the sixth form requires improvement as not all students follow individualised study programmes that prepare them well for their next steps.
- Parents are generally supportive of the school, though some feel that teachers could do more to challenge and motivate their children.

Governance of the school

- The Dragonfly Trust has recently reorganised its governance and Writhlington School now has its own local governing body. The chair of the governing body has been in this role since September 2016 but has been supported by the previous chair who is now the chair of the multi-academy trust. Governors know the school well and are committed to securing improvements.
- The current governing body has a good breadth of expertise and experience.
- Governors are keen to hold leaders to account, but over the past few years they have sometimes too readily accepted leaders' over-optimistic view of pupils' performance.
- Governors check the school website to ensure that it contains the information required and that it provides good access to useful information for parents.
- Governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective through regular checks with the school's designated safeguarding lead.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff have been trained appropriately and can explain the procedures for safeguarding pupils. They have a good understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and are mindful of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school and this is confirmed by the responses to Parent View. They have an excellent understanding of e-safety and they are confident that they know to whom they should speak if they have a problem. However, some aspects of safeguarding, such as the dangers of drugs, sexual exploitation and extremism, are not consistently well understood by pupils.
- The senior leader who is the designated safeguarding lead is well informed about all aspects of safeguarding. Relevant records are detailed and of good quality.
- Attendance is improving and is now in line with the national average. Attendance is monitored by senior staff, but systems are not yet promoting good attendance in all groups of pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not yet consistently good across subjects and for different classes within subjects. Consequently, pupils' progress varies too widely. In some subjects, teachers set challenging work and expect good standards of presentation; in others, expectations are lower and pupils make less progress.

- Too many teachers do not have high enough expectations of what different pupils can achieve, particularly most-able pupils and disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders have ensured that the feedback to pupils about their work has improved. Work seen in books during lessons suggests that most teachers follow the school's policy. They give pupils effective advice which is helping them to improve their work. There is, however, still some inconsistency in the application of the policy across the school.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' progress are not comprehensive enough to enable them to identify pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Support for these pupils is therefore not put in place quickly enough to help them catch up.
- The identification of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not sufficiently rigorous. Consequently, there are some pupils in the school who do not receive support closely matched to their needs. The leadership team is aware of the issue and is beginning to improve provision. However, leaders have not yet ensured that all pupils receive the help and specific support needed to achieve their best.
- The use of targets aimed at helping pupils make more rapid progress is inconsistent. In some classes, pupils understand their targets and use them to improve their work; in others, pupils' understanding is limited and they are not clear about the steps they should take to make faster progress. Some teachers expressed concerns over the degree of challenge offered by the targets and were uncertain about changing them to reflect pupils' potential achievement more accurately.
- In most classrooms, there are positive relationships between pupils, and between pupils and teachers. This creates an environment conducive to learning.
- Teachers use praise and encouragement well to motivate students and there is a strong culture of celebration throughout the school.
- In the sixth form, students are keen to learn and respond well, especially where the teaching is challenging and well planned.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The personal development education programme, while comprehensive, is fragmented. The programme does not yet provide a coherent series of learning opportunities to enable pupils to have a strong understanding of the world around them.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.

- The personal development education programme, while comprehensive, is fragmented. The programme does not yet provide a coherent series of learning opportunities to enable pupils to have a strong understanding of the world around them.
- Pupils are safe and well cared for. Pupils and parents generally report that the school looks after them well. Bullying is rare and, if it does take place, pupils are confident that it will be dealt with sensitively and effectively by their teachers and senior staff.
- Careers guidance is improving in the school. There is a strong programme of information evenings and events, and pupils have good access to advice regarding option choices. In Year 10, pupils have the chance to transfer to The Mendip Studio School, which shares the school's site, although careful consideration is not always given to ensure that pupils are on the most appropriate courses.
- The school promotes a culture of respect and tolerance. For example, sixth-form students expressed confidence that a student's sexual orientation would not be a barrier to the student being welcomed into the school community.
- Pupils' personal development is enhanced by the extensive programme of extra-curricular opportunities available to them. A remarkable feature of the school is The Orchid Project, an activity that enables pupils and students to get involved with a nationally renowned programme. Pupils from all year groups and all backgrounds learn how to germinate and cultivate orchids, and they develop an expert understanding of the subject. The school's expertise in this area has led to exhibitions at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and study trips to unusual destinations such as Rwanda.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school is an orderly environment. Pupils conduct themselves well throughout the day including at break- and lunchtimes. Leaders in the school have worked hard to improve behaviour and the systems they have introduced have clearly had an effect. There is typically little low-level disruption in lessons, but where it does occur, it is where pupils are not fully engaged in their learning.
- Pupils' attendance is in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is twice the national average and steps are being taken to manage this as part of the drive to improve outcomes.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' standards of achievement require improvement. In 2016, the proportion achieving grades A*–C at GCSE in both English and mathematics was below the national average. Some pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able, do not make the progress of which they are capable.

- The progress of pupils in both English and mathematics has previously been significantly below average. Currently, pupils are making better progress than those in previous years. However, progress is not consistently good across year groups and across subjects. In too many classes, the quality of pupils' work is below expected standards.
- The school's current predictions for outcomes in 2017 are more positive. However, the quality of pupils' work does not fully match the school's and subject leaders' evaluations of their current progress.
- Throughout the school, the most able pupils are not challenged sufficiently in their learning to enable them to make at least good progress when compared with other pupils nationally with the same starting points.
- Pupils throughout the school are encouraged to read by the 'Drop Everything and Read' (DEAR) programme, which takes place in tutor time. This is helping to improve pupils' fluency and concentration and is enabling pupils with low prior attainment to catch up with other pupils in the school. However, DEAR time is not used consistently across the school and the impact of the programme has yet to be evaluated fully.
- Leaders at all levels are working hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school and this is gradually having an impact on pupils' aspirations. For example, they are beginning to ensure that more pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are receiving appropriate support.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Achievement in the sixth form has been variable in recent years. Students' performance in vocational subjects has been stronger than in academic subjects.
- While much teaching in the sixth form has improved recently, students' outcomes are yet to catch up with developments in teaching and learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and this enables them increasingly to engage students in their learning and to motivate them to do well.
- Information, advice and guidance in the sixth form do not always ensure that students choose courses suited to their abilities and that will enable them to take their next steps confidently.
- Leadership of the sixth form requires improvement. Leaders do not pay enough attention to the 16–19 study programmes. Not enough time is taken to ensure that students pursue activities that develop their employment skills beyond their core academic studies. For example, too few students currently undertake meaningful work experience.
- Retention is improving, but too many students leave the sixth form at the end of Year 12. This is because some students undertake courses to which they are not suited.
- Students enjoy being in the sixth form and many take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school. They also have opportunities to develop their leadership skills in areas such as outdoor education and through their participation in the Combined Cadet Force.

School details

Unique reference number	137548
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	10003135

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 comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,423
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	238
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Dennis Lewis
Headteacher	Mark Everett
Telephone number	01761 433581
Website	www.writhlington.org.uk
Email address	slock@writhlington.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school does not currently use alternative provision.

- Writhlington School is part of The Dragonfly Education Trust, which also includes The Mendip Studio School and The Peasedown St John Primary School.
- Writhlington School is an above-average-sized secondary school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The school has a very small number of children looked after.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' and students' learning in a wide range of lessons. The majority of observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors examined pupils' work.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders, other staff and groups of students. The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documentation, including the school development plan, information on students' attainment and progress, and records relating to safeguarding, students' behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of the 214 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire. They also considered responses to the staff and pupil questionnaires completed during the inspection.

Inspection team

Richard Steward, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Malcolm Davison	Ofsted Inspector
Gillian Carter	Ofsted Inspector
David Herbert	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
David New	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Harris	Ofsted Inspector
Benjamin Houghton	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017