

Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100187
Local Authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	376368
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1200
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bob Janes
Headteacher	Byron Parker and Tim Plumb (co-headteachers)
Date of previous school inspection	1–2 October 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors visited 34 lessons, observed 34 different teachers, and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. They evaluated students' attainment over three years, schemes of work, policies, the school's self-evaluation and development plan and minutes of governing body meetings. They considered 205 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents and carers, 169 responses to the students' questionnaire and 55 responses from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effectively is assessment information used in planning lessons and setting personal targets for students?
- How effectively managed is the support provided for vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- How consistently effective are leaders and managers at all levels in disseminating and embedding best practice in teaching and assessment?

Information about the school

The school moved to its current site in 1999. It is led by two co-headteachers, one of whom is also the executive headteacher of another school within the local authority. In September 2011, Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys gained official status as a provider for students aged from 11 to 18 years, with co-educational provision in the sixth form. Until September 2012, however, while there will continue to be sixth form teaching on the Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys site, all sixth form students will remain on the roll of Plumstead Manor/Negus School, with whom there has been shared provision for a number of years.

The school is larger than the average secondary school, with a high number of pupils from minority ethnic groups. About one in every five students is of Black African heritage, with others drawn from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds; almost half speak English as an additional language. A similar proportion of students, much higher than is typically found nationally, have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Predominantly these students have learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social developmental needs. The proportion of students joining or leaving the school part way through their education is high. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is more than double the national average.

In 1997, the school gained specialist status for technology. In 2007 it was the first school to achieve the gold award for work-related learning. It also has Healthy Schools status and an award from the National Association for Able Children (NACE) for its work with gifted and talented students. It participates in the Lead Practitioners programme, working with the National College for School Leadership. It is a Future Leaders School, a Training Teachers School and a member of the Partners in Excellence group.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

'Exciting' and 'empowering' was how Key Stage 3 students characterised this now outstanding school. 'I aspire to come back here and teach,' said a student who has recently won a place at Cambridge University to read mathematics. The school has great strengths in: its well-directed and highly inclusive curriculum provision; the comprehensive pastoral care and academic guidance offered to students; the sustained promotion of equality of opportunity and self-esteem; and the enterprising development of excellent partnerships, with parents and carers as well as with other schools and colleges. Morale among staff and students is impressively high. It is reflected in their buoyant self-confidence, mutual respect and genuine pleasure in shared and individual achievements. The governing body and the two headteachers present a highly ambitious vision for the school's development as a centre of excellence within the wider community and as a leader in the development of teaching skills and curriculum provision. A constant and constructive cycle of review and innovation, accurate self-evaluation that shapes planning, and the extremely positive impact of recent strategies on improving students' achievement indicate that capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

Students in this ethnically and culturally diverse school arrive with lower-than-average prior attainment and many have limited English skills. All groups make excellent progress. There has been a sustained upward trend in GCSE and equivalent examinations. Provisional results for 2011 show that nine out of every 10 students achieved at least five A* to C grades, and two thirds achieved five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics. While about one in four lessons is outstanding, teaching overall is good. No teaching is less than satisfactory. All teachers provide a clear and coherent framework that underpins students' confident progress towards success in national tests. Variation in the quality of teaching is seen most clearly in the management of group work and in the balance developed between teacher-led and student-initiated learning. Not all teaching challenges more-able students to develop higher-order and independent thinking. Similarly, while there are examples of excellent practice, not all marking balances encouragement with specific guidance, especially for able students, on how to raise their level. This issue is being energetically and effectively tackled.

Students' success as learners is complemented by their steady development of attitudes and skills that will serve them well in the future. They take great pride in the style and success of their school and in their individual contribution to it. High attendance rates support students' assertion that they feel extremely safe at school.

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Behaviour in lessons and around the school is characterised by confident good manners and a well-embedded respect for rules. As a Key Stage 4 student commented, 'safety is everywhere'. Highly visible and proactive prefects monitor students' punctuality, behaviour and appearance as well as being excellent role models. Should anyone breach the school's very clear code of conduct – what a Year 8 student described as 'someone trying to make themselves a big guy' – sanctions are swift and well understood, followed by extremely careful and well-coordinated mentoring.

There are opportunities for each year group to make a positive difference both to the school and to the wider community; for example, through the highly influential student council, student representation on the governing body, their contribution to the evaluation of teaching and learning and their active engagement in community projects such as 'Changing Places'. For this, students created a photographic record of their local environment that then set priorities for community action. As well as acquiring good literacy, numeracy and technology skills, students steadily develop personal skills of leadership, teamwork, negotiation and practical problem-solving that prepare them extremely well for later life. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very strong, as seen in their active involvement in arts projects and activities, their openness to new ideas and their readiness to take responsibility for each other and for others beyond their immediate world, for example through active support for Amnesty International.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reinforce the upward trend in attainment and progress by ensuring that:
 - best practice in teaching and learning is consistently embedded across all departments and key stages, with a particular focus on the management of group and pair work so that all students make an active contribution, and on providing challenge that consistently promotes independent and higher-order thinking
 - all marking of work balances encouragement with specific guidance on how students, including the most able, can improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students are very well motivated and confident that, if they apply themselves and respond positively to the guidance and support they receive, each one is capable of worthwhile achievement regardless of background and innate ability. Those known to be eligible for free school meals, for example, make significantly better progress than similar students nationally, and reach above average levels of attainment. In 2010, nearly two thirds of these students gained five or more A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics, and three quarters achieved at least two A* to C GCSE grades in science. There is no significant underachievement in any area and the steep upward trend in attainment has been sustained for at least four years. Provisional results for 2011 show students attaining above average results in core

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subjects and a high proportion achieving five or more good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Over a quarter of the work seen in lessons and in students’ books during the inspection was outstanding and two thirds was good. Movement between ability-based sets in core subjects, one-to-one support for those in the early stages of acquiring English, additional tuition at the start and end of each day and booster sessions on Saturdays and during holidays are among the highly effective strategies used to ensure that no student is allowed to lose momentum or to flounder for long. In a humanities class for less able Year 7 students, for example, there was a buzz of purposeful discussion about what happened in Pompeii and how we know. New vocabulary was explored and the perspectives presented in video clips thoughtfully examined. Those of mixed White and Black African and of African heritages make significantly better progress than similar groups nationally, supported by a whole-school ethos that has high aspirations for all and celebrates individual achievement, an inclusive curriculum and highly constructive home–school liaison. One-to-one tuition, small-group teaching and well-targeted booster sessions enable those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to progress as well as their contemporaries.

Matching and supporting their excellent academic progress is students’ steadily developing sense of responsibility for themselves and for others, and their understanding that success is attainable but requires commitment and effort. They appreciate that this includes behaving sensibly, keeping healthy and practising the disciplines and skills needed to succeed in whatever career path they hope to follow. The great majority go on to further education or training. They are well presented, cheerfully confident and courteously persuasive.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will	1

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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contribute to their future economic well-being	
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The school has an unusually high proportion of Advanced Skills Teachers and Leading Practitioners, many of whom achieved these skills and status with the encouragement and mentoring provided by the school. They demonstrate excellent practice and offer well-targeted professional development for young and relatively inexperienced teachers. Shared strengths include: enthusiastically communicated subject knowledge; an excellent rapport with students; intelligent use of information about attainment and progress to match the style, content and pace in lessons to students' individual needs; readiness to respond to unplanned opportunities to extend or reinforce learning; good questioning skills; effective deployment of learning support assistants; and confident use of varied resources. There is, however, some unevenness in the quality of teaching. While most group and pair work is lively and productive, and students are regularly encouraged to review their own and others' work, on occasions some students remain passive and do not contribute actively to discussion or problem-solving. Much marking of written work is meticulous and challenging but praise is not always linked to clear guidance on what students, especially the most able, should do to raise their level. Nonetheless, the combination of teaching that is never less than highly competent and students' extremely positive approach to learning underpins the excellent progress made by all groups.

The curriculum has the breadth and flexibility to ensure that every student has the pathway and the support required to make significant progress. Students joining the school partway through their education and those with limited English skills are able to integrate socially and catch up with their contemporaries quickly after detailed assessment of their needs on entry and provision tailored to their individual needs. Funding linked to the specialism has supported investment in technology and in curriculum development within the lead subjects – mathematics, science and information and communication technology. The curriculum as a whole is continually developing in response to changing expectations nationally and to students' changing needs and potential. The emphasis is on providing students with a taste of success early enough to give them the confidence and motivation to raise their aspirations. For example, the school's outstanding success in science is linked to students' opportunity to complete a BTEC science course at the end of Key Stage 3 or early in Key Stage 4 and to build on their success in this to tackle GCSE science. At the start of Year 11, many students have already secured two or three good GCSE passes, giving them the scope to extend their range or move on to higher level qualifications.

Those who enter the school with low prior attainment thrive and achieve worthwhile qualifications through small-group teaching and a well-designed programme that is both supportive and challenging. Students' opportunities are extended constructively

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through links with other schools and colleges. The school’s curriculum model is used as an example of best practice by others. The mainstream curriculum is extremely well complemented by opportunities for students to extend or consolidate their learning. Most students participate in sports, some achieving success at national and international level, and in the arts. Theatre trips, overseas expeditions and residential visits to rural parts of Wales are among these well-supported opportunities.

As students and their parents and carers are keen to point out, the success of the school is built on closely interwoven academic guidance and pastoral care. Heads of year play a key role in overseeing and coordinating strategies to promote students’ personal development and achievement. In weekly year-based meetings, the well-being and progress of individual students are reviewed by representatives from each section of the school, and carefully tailored responses worked out. The records kept of changing circumstances and interventions to support vulnerable students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are meticulous, and liaison with external agencies is extremely well managed. Teaching assistants are trained in how to support students with language and communication difficulties. Students with emotional and social issues clearly benefit from counselling and from small-group discussion sessions, and also from the school’s powerful culture of consideration and respect for individuals whatever their circumstances. Parents and carers describe this care and guidance as ‘invaluable’ and are confident that their concerns are listened to carefully and sensitively responded to.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

High aspirations, the willingness to be innovative and to respond to changing circumstances, carefully delegated roles and responsibilities and rigorous monitoring of teaching, learning and pastoral support are the key to the school’s extremely effective leadership and management. Substantial and relevant experience among its members enables the governing body to evaluate the school’s strengths and areas for development very accurately and to be both rigorous and supportive in holding the school to account. At every level, concern for and action taken to ensure the safety and well-being of students is threaded through decision-making and the day-to-day running of the school. Child protection procedures are extremely thorough and used by other schools as a benchmark for their own provision.

The school has been imaginative and enterprising in its partnership with parents and

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carers, with particular success in engaging those from minority ethnic groups to play an active part in their children’s education. The school is an impressively cohesive and civilised multicultural community, with students’ awareness of international diversity extended not only through the curriculum but through experiences brought by those joining the school from what are often challenging circumstances in other countries. This makes an important contribution to the school’s extremely effective promotion of equality of respect and opportunity.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

A few of those responding to the inspection questionnaire were doubtful that the school successfully encouraged their children to be healthy and not all felt their suggestions and concerns were given adequate consideration. The great majority of parents and carers felt confident that the school was well managed, that they were kept well informed about their children’s progress, that their children were making good progress, were well taught, enjoyed school and were safe there. Evidence gathered during the inspection supported the more positive views presented by parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys 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 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 205 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1200 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	81	40	113	55	10	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	73	36	122	60	9	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	99	48	92	45	10	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	37	116	57	7	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	78	38	116	57	6	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	75	37	109	53	17	8	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	61	30	117	57	21	10	1	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)	78	38	106	52	7	3	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	70	34	117	57	9	4	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	85	41	104	51	10	5	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	54	26	121	59	16	8	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	89	43	100	49	5	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	101	49	98	48	5	2	0	0

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%.

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. 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.

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.



14 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys, Greenwich SE28 8AT

My colleagues and I greatly appreciated the confidence, courtesy and helpfulness you showed when we inspected your school recently. We agree with you that your school provides an outstanding education and meets your individual needs and ambitions extremely well.

We could see that you are keen to learn, work very well together and have the confidence to share your ideas with others and to accept their assessment of your work. You make excellent progress – your positive attitude to learning has contributed significantly to the school's steadily rising levels of attainment. You benefit a great deal from the exceptional care and well-directed support you are given by those who have responsibility for you. We were pleased to know that you feel very safe in school and to see that you understand and take seriously the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The school's excellent attendance record shows that you are happy to be there. Many of you make a really valuable contribution to the local community, for example through involvement in the Changing Places scheme as part of preparations for the London Olympics.

So that your progress and learning continue to improve we have asked your headteachers to ensure that:

- everyone who teaches you engages your interest, responds to the different ways in which you learn and challenges and supports you as the best teachers do
- as well as giving you credit for what you have done well, your teachers always suggest ways in which you can improve your work.

I look forward to seeing your school continue to go from strength to strength. You can all help it do that by taking full advantage of the growing number of opportunities you have to develop your personal abilities and interests.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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