

Inspection of a good school: Wallingford School

St George's Road, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 8HH

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 November 2022

Outcome

Wallingford School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an inclusive school. Pupils of all abilities learn together in a diverse and rich environment. Leaders and staff have high aspirations for all pupils. Pupils respond positively to this high ambition and, consequently, learn well in all subjects. The school's motto of pupils becoming 'able and qualified' permeates all activities.

Pupils are happy and feel safe. Staff have high expectations of behaviour. Pupils rise to these. The environment is calm and orderly. Bullying is not tolerated. Leaders deal robustly but fairly with any unkind behaviour. Sixth-form students are excellent role models. They support younger pupils in lessons. Many sixth-form students are proud to act as subject ambassadors. This enables them to contribute positively to the school community.

There is an impressive range of activities that extend the curriculum beyond the academic. Residential trips and visits form an important part of learning in most subjects. Pupils participate in a wide range of activities, including sports clubs, the school band and photography club. The school is at the heart of the local community. All pupils relished the opportunity to participate in a recent sponsored walk. They raised substantial funds for the local air ambulance charity.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. The English Baccalaureate suite of subjects is at its heart. In the sixth form, students follow appropriate courses. Staff have strong subject knowledge across all subjects. They use their expertise to help pupils learn more and remember more. This helps pupils gradually build knowledge and skills. In most subjects, for example history and science, the curriculum is coherently planned and sequenced. Leaders have carefully considered the essential knowledge pupils need to cover. However, in English and design technology, the curriculum is not fully developed yet.

The assessment system gives valuable feedback to pupils and staff. Teachers use assessment effectively to help identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Subsequent lesson activities enable pupils to overcome misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from the same curriculum as their peers. Expert staff identify the barriers that exist for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND. Teachers adapt their lessons to meet their needs. However, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are not yet achieving their very best outcomes in lessons as the learning is not always demanding enough for them.

Pupils read widely and often. Leaders appreciate the importance of reading and it is central to the curriculum. Pupils study rich and challenging texts in lessons and they practice reading fluently. Detailed analysis of the texts helps them to understand the plots and how to analyse complex information in different contexts. Leaders accurately identify pupils who find reading more challenging. The recently strengthened learning support team supports these pupils to catch up quickly.

Pupils behave well in lessons. Any low-level disruption is dealt with swiftly by staff. Pupils cherish the 'star' system of rewards for effort and participation. Strong pastoral support is available for all. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong. Staff know pupils and their families well. These positive relationships help staff address problems and support challenging issues where necessary.

Leaders prioritise pupils' wider development. An effective careers education enables pupils to make informed choices about their future in education, training or work. Pupils learn about social, moral, cultural and spiritual education in PSHE and assemblies. They know how to keep healthy and safe. Pupils and students in the sixth form have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. They talk knowledgeably about topics, such as equality and diversity. The recently adopted personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum supports pupils' wider development. Leaders are aware of the further work that is required to identify the precise knowledge from this scheme that pupils should know and remember.

Leadership is strong at all levels. There is a comprehensive programme of training and development for all staff. They value the annual residential staff development conference. Teachers benefit from peer coaching to improve their teaching. Some staff value the opportunity to work with other schools in the trust. Governors and trustees provide appropriate support and challenge to leaders. Staff are proud to work at the school. They feel that leaders take their workload into account when planning essential activities. Leaders, including governors, are proud of their inclusive ethos. Parents speak highly of the school. One parent, typical of many said, 'The school provides support for every pupil, not just the high academic achievers. This ethos is the main reason we chose this school.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A team of competent and expert staff lead safeguarding. All staff are aware of how to identify potential safeguarding concerns. There are robust processes in place to identify pupils who may be in need of support. Leaders are diligent in following up concerns.

Record keeping is strong. Leaders effectively deal with concerns raised by staff. They ensure that the appropriate help is secured swiftly for pupils when needed.

Pupils value the support that they receive. All pupils have a known adult that they would talk to if they had concerns. This helps pupils to feel safe in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum in some subjects, for example English, design technology and PSHE, is not yet coherently planned and well sequenced. As a result, pupils' learning is variable. Leaders should ensure that curriculum thinking in these subjects is developed and identifies the most important content for pupils to learn and remember.
- Support for vulnerable pupils, including those identified as disadvantaged and those with SEND, is not yet ambitious enough. Some pupils can do more than is expected of them. Curriculum adaptations do not enable these pupils to achieve their very best possible outcomes. Leaders must ensure that they develop clear and effective systems to support and extend these pupils across all subjects.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged Wallingford School to be good in March 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	137357
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10211563
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1344
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	245
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ian Domville
Headteacher	John Marston
Website	www.wallingfordschool.com
Date of previous inspection	16 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Wallingford School is part of The Merchant Taylors' Oxfordshire Academy Trust.
- Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.
- The school currently uses two registered and eight unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors carried out this ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders of the school, members of staff, and pupils. The lead inspector also met with governors and a representative of the members of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, history, modern foreign languages and design technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks. Inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with staff, pupils and parents to gather their views. They considered 303 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 192 free-text comments. Inspectors also took account of 75 responses to the staff survey. Inspectors spoke to a number of pupils while on inspection and took account of 170 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Derry

His Majesty's Inspector

Patrick Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

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