

Inspection of William Ellis School

Highgate Road, London NW5 1RN

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 May 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

In most subjects, leaders are clear about what they expect pupils to learn and remember in the long term. The diverse needs and interests of pupils have been considered in setting the curriculum goals. However, leaders have not ensured that the curriculum is sequenced and taught consistently well. Over time, pupils' learning is uneven. They acquire secure knowledge in some subjects but not others.

Pupils are kept safe. Most pupils trust teachers to help them if they need it, for example if they are bullied. However, not all pupils feel this way. Some feel unable to share concerns with staff and others reported feeling worried about behaviour around the school, including the use of derogatory language. Leaders have not ensured that all staff apply the behaviour policy consistently. This means that the school is not routinely providing a calm and orderly learning environment.

Pupils' personal development is promoted well, with pupils' interests and needs front and centre. Leaders ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of clubs, trips and extra-curricular activities. The outdoor curriculum, which includes camping and hiking activities, is particularly popular. Careers provision is well planned, especially in the sixth form. Students enjoy the opportunities they have for work experience and university taster sessions, for example.

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

In Years 7 to 11, the broad curriculum is centred on the aims of the national curriculum. In some subjects, leaders' curriculum thinking makes clear the sequence that pupils need to be taught essential ideas. How these ideas should be taught is also clearly understood. In languages, for example, pupils' progression towards ambitious goals is carefully planned for and supported, with essential ideas revisited through well-chosen and demanding tasks. However, this is not consistent across subjects and year groups. Over time, this prevents pupils from acquiring knowledge securely and leads to unevenness in the quality of pupils' work.

Subject leaders consider how to use assessment to check knowledge. However, the way assessment approaches are put into practice is mixed. Some teachers use assessment effectively, particularly in the sixth form. They plan learning that takes careful account of pupils' starting points, and check understanding systematically. However, some teachers do not identify key knowledge that pupils need to remember in the long term and systematically check that pupils have learned it. This affects how well the curriculum is delivered.

In a few subjects, the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 does not provide for breadth and depth in pupils' learning. In design and technology, for example, pupils are not taught the fundamentals of nutrition and cooking. GCSE computing is a popular option. However, what pupils study in Years 7 to 9 does not provide them with a firm knowledge base for their future study of this subject.

Leaders have established a rich curriculum offer for pupils in Years 10 and 11, as well as the sixth form. They ensure that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make ambitious choices. At GCSE, for example, 85% of pupils take at least one language and a humanities subject. Pupils are also encouraged to opt for creative subjects, and many do. In the sixth form, the academic offer is matched with a range of vocational options. Students are supported to select the right courses for them. The curriculum is typically ambitious and taught well. Sixth-form students achieve highly and behave well.

Leadership of the provision for pupils with SEND is new. Leaders have focused on understanding and planning for pupils' needs. Pupils receive a range of additional support, some of which is delivered in smaller groups. In classrooms, sometimes suitable adaptations are made to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. However, this is not consistently the case. Pupils who join the school needing extra help to read fluently are quickly identified and receive effective support.

In lessons, some learning time is lost to low-level disruption in Years 7 to 11. Disorderly behaviour in corridors is not dealt with consistently by staff. Some pupils are concerned that derogatory language is not tackled effectively. All of this sometimes makes pupils feel uncomfortable. Working together with pupil leaders, leaders are taking some steps to make things better. For example, they are introducing a new system for rewarding positive behaviour. Leaders have also changed lunch arrangements to allow pupils more space to socialise in and to ensure calmer corridors. Pupils are taught about difference and the need to respect others, as well as the importance of sharing any concerns early.

Pupils appreciate the rich extra-curricular offer. Pupils' personal development is provided for well. Pupils enjoy clubs for music and sport, and many undertake the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Leaders ensure that pupils receive support with choosing their future options, including at GCSE and in the sixth form. Personal, social, health and economic education covers important topics, such as keeping healthy and personal safety.

Governors work closely and supportively with leaders and pupil representatives. However, the way in which they hold leaders to account lacks rigour.

Staff are loyal to the school. They appreciate the level of care leaders show towards their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have set up robust pastoral systems to identify pupils who may need help. They consider individual needs carefully. Leaders ensure that pupils know how to report concerns about their safety and welfare. Staff and governors are trained

effectively. Staff are well informed about possible risks, and know how to raise concerns when necessary.

When concerns arise, leaders make well-considered decisions about how to protect and support pupils. Leaders and staff work effectively with families and ensure that appropriate help is given. They seek out additional support from a range of services, for example through counselling and outreach support.

Leaders and governors make appropriate vetting checks for those applying to work at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In Years 7 to 11, expectations for how pupils will successfully progress, step-by-step, towards meeting ambitious goals have not been embedded across the curriculum. Checks to find out if pupils have learned knowledge are not used consistently to support the delivery of the curriculum, including for pupils with SEND. This means that in some subjects, pupils struggle to build up detailed knowledge over time. Leaders should put in place a clear consistent approach to planning for and assessing pupils' progression through the curriculum. They should strengthen their oversight of how effectively the curriculum is being put into practice in the classroom, including how well all pupils remember key subject content over the longer term.
- In a few subjects, the scope of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is underdeveloped. Some knowledge is not covered in sufficient depth and breadth. Leaders should review and improve their curriculum thinking in these subjects. This includes making sure that the taught curriculum fully matches the aims and ambition of the national curriculum.
- Pupils do not behave consistently well, both in lessons and around the school. This is because some staff do not reinforce leaders' expectations for behaviour. Leaders need to take effective steps to improve behaviour and ensure that staff follow agreed policies and procedures. This includes responding appropriately to incidents of derogatory language.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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

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| Unique reference number | 100056 |
| Local authority | Camden |
| Inspection number | 10227948 |
| Type of school | Secondary comprehensive |
| School category | Voluntary aided |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Boys |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 888 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 279 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Selina Skipwith |
| Headteacher | Izzy Jones |
| Website | www.williamellis.camden.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 28 February and 1 March 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- In March 2021, a new headteacher started at the school on a permanent basis. Since the last inspection, there have also been other substantial changes to the senior leadership team.
- A new chair of governors was elected in September 2020.
- Currently, leaders make use of three registered alternative providers.
- Sixth-form students have some lessons at other local schools, including a vocational course based at Talacre Sports Centre.
- Careers guidance meets the requirement 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 inspection under section 5 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 spoke to senior staff with responsibility for curriculum, behaviour and attendance, personal development, inclusion, safeguarding, literacy and the sixth form. They also spoke with a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, English, history, art, and modern foreign languages. 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. Inspectors considered some other subjects, including in the sixth form. They also considered the support in place for pupils with SEND.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors spoke to groups of pupils and teachers across the school, considered the responses to surveys from pupils, parents and staff, and spoke to safeguarding leaders. They also reviewed records of pre-employment checks and examined safeguarding records and case studies. They spoke to members of the governing body.
- The responses of pupils, staff and parents and carers to Ofsted's surveys were also taken into account.

Inspection team

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|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Alice Clay, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Charlotte Robinson | Ofsted Inspector |
| Pamela Fearnley | Ofsted Inspector |
| John Blaney | Ofsted Inspector |

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