

William Ellis School

Highgate Road, London NW5 1RN

Inspection dates

28 February–1 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- William Ellis School provides pupils with a rounded education that develops them into confident young men. Their behaviour is good, as is their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- Social inclusion is at the heart of the school's ethos and culture. The school makes good efforts to nurture all pupils, regardless of their background.
- Pupils follow an academic curriculum that provides them with a good breadth and depth of knowledge. This serves them well for the next stages in their lives.
- Music, sport and outdoor learning are important areas of the school's life. These all play an important part in developing pupils' confidence and resilience.
- Teachers have secure subject knowledge. Lessons are rich in subject content. Most pupils apply themselves well in class and are willing learners. In contrast, homework is not used consistently to support pupils' learning, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is a key area for improvement.
- Safeguarding is effective.
- Despite some notable strengths, pupils' progress in the 2016 GCSE examinations was slower than expected. Leaders analysed these results and have taken action, including through the performance management of teachers. Current pupils' progress is improving.
- The headteacher is widely respected throughout the school community and provides good leadership. He is supported by some able senior leaders. Teaching, learning and assessment are led particularly well.
- The quality of leadership throughout the school is less even. Plans are already in place for reorganising the leadership structure, including the management of support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Governors offer the school much expertise and knowledge. They are open, challenging and fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are generally well organised, but their evaluations of the additional funding's impact have not been conducted quickly enough.
- The sixth form is good. Collaboration as part of the local consortium has strengthened management of the sixth form. It also offers students a broader range of curriculum opportunities.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Implement the school management restructure and the recommendations of the special educational needs review, ensuring that leadership responsibilities and accountabilities are more evenly distributed.
- Review the use of homework, so that it has increased benefit for pupils of all abilities and especially those who are disadvantaged.
- Revisit the governing body's strategy for evaluating the use of additional funding, so that reviews are conducted swiftly and findings have greater impact.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher provides strong, principled leadership. Along with governors and other leaders, he models high standards for courteous behaviour. His leadership is recognised throughout the school community as being central to the school's distinctive ethos and culture.
- The curriculum is academically robust. As well as English and mathematics, leaders and governors place great store on educating pupils well in languages, humanities, sciences and the arts. This diet plays an important part in promoting pupils' preparation for the experiences, responsibilities and opportunities of life in modern Britain.
- In the few areas that are less effective, leaders have decided to offer alternative options. GCSE courses are prepared for by a solid key stage 3 curriculum, taught over three years. Most pupils study two languages and those who need it are given additional English teaching.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong. The formal curriculum is complemented by a good range of extra-curricular activities, including in music and sport. The school has its own centre for outdoor learning. This is used for fieldwork trips, yearly camps for key stage 3 pupils and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award activities for older pupils. These develop pupils' good character and determination.
- The headteacher is supported by able and enthusiastic senior leaders. All are committed to the school's values and expectations. However, leadership is not outstanding because its impact is uneven across the school. Advanced plans are in place to reorganise senior and middle leadership to redress this imbalance.
- Leaders' evaluations are accurate and recognise that there is a way to go before the school can be considered outstanding. The local authority shares this view. The school development plan and subjects' plans set out high expectations for teaching and learning, pupils' personal development and leadership. However, these plans do not give enough prominence to meeting the school's challenging targets for pupils' outcomes.
- Effective action has been taken following the 2016 examination results, including eradicating the weakest teaching. A small number of teachers are currently on intensive support plans. Good collaboration with local authority consultants is aimed at securing further improvements in English and mathematics.
- Leaders are of the view that, because of current changes to assessment and new GCSE courses, some staff are erring on the side of caution with their predictions. What is clear is that systems for tracking pupils' progress are detailed. Senior leaders are using the information thoughtfully to ask questions and intervene where needed.
- Teaching is led well. An assistant headteacher leads this important area with clarity and determination. Since her appointment, she has already made a significant difference throughout the school. This includes coaching middle leaders in giving greater challenge to improve teaching in their departments.

- Additional funding, including the pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up premium, is used effectively to support pupils in the classroom, aid transition from primary school and enable pupils to participate in additional activities. Funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used appropriately, including through engaging with external agencies and specialist services.
- Morale among the staff is good. Staff who responded to Ofsted's inspection survey said that they are proud to work at the school, and that they feel respected and trusted. The great majority said that they feel challenged but also well supported through professional development activities.

Governance

- Members of the governing body offer an excellent set of skills and experience. They make themselves visible to staff, parents, carers and pupils.
- Governors are transparent in the way they conduct their business. Minutes of all meetings are available on the school's website. These show that governors know the school, fulfil their statutory obligations and challenge school leaders.
- Governors ensure that performance management is carried out effectively, including that of the headteacher.
- Governors ensure that spending of the pupil premium and other additional funding is strategically planned. The review of the 2015/16 additional funding considers the impact of the pupil premium, and the Year 7 literacy and catch-up funding. This document has been drafted but has not been ratified. Inspectors are of the view that it should have been completed and approved straight after the 2016 results were known, so that any resultant changes could have had an even swifter impact.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has an established safeguarding culture. All required policies and necessary procedures are in place. Personnel records for all staff and volunteers are up to date and are counterchecked regularly by the headteacher and governors. Staff training about safeguarding is regular and appropriate. Protocols are clear and, on the rare occasions when concerns have been raised, staff have taken swift and timely action. This includes liaison with external agencies such as the local authority and social services. Records of individual cases are kept in suitable detail.
- Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, said overwhelmingly that their children are safe at school. The school provides useful information for parents on how to keep their children safe, via the school's website. Pupils who spoke with inspectors showed sensible awareness of issues such as radicalisation and extremism, online safety and homophobic behaviour.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Typically, classrooms at William Ellis School are orderly places where good learning takes place. Staff have a common expectation that pupils will apply themselves and work with positive attitudes. Working relationships in classrooms are good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. Planning of lesson subject content is thorough. Pupils benefit from this and, in return, are willing learners.
- The school has a clear overarching assessment policy, supplemented by appropriate subject-specific guidance. This helps teachers assess pupils' work in a way that is meaningful and relevant to their subject.
- A group of full-time workers from a national education charity provides effective additional support and mentoring for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to regular classroom teaching, the school provides additional after-school and occasional Saturday classes to ensure that pupils are well prepared for their examinations.
- Classroom teachers are clear about different pupils' starting points and what is expected if they are to make good progress. However, this information is not always used well to provide activities for pupils of different abilities.
- Teaching assistants typically provide effective in-class support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, this support is responsive, rather than planned. Not all teachers plan in good detail for the needs of these pupils.
- The school has a clear homework policy and published timetable. Scrutiny of pupils' planners shows that, in practice, the amount and frequency of homework set are inconsistent. Teachers do not routinely follow the school's policy. This means that opportunities are missed to extend and consolidate the good work done in class, especially for those who are disadvantaged.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Parents and pupils speak very positively about the school's work to promote and improve pupils' personal development. This includes a firm but humane approach by school leaders. Opportunities abound for pupils to discuss and debate issues. Assemblies complement the 'deep learning days' when issues such as equalities and radicalisation are explored in more detail.
- School leaders prioritise the development of pupils' mental and emotional health, as well as their physical well-being. One parent commented that 'I am really happy with the emphasis on deep learning, mindfulness and reflection in the school'. This includes the presence of a qualified counsellor, to whom the pupils can self-refer or be directed by their tutor.
- Transition arrangements between primary and secondary school are particularly strong. This is no mean feat, considering that pupils join William Ellis from over 35 primary schools. The transition summer schools are well thought of by parents and pupils.

- A small but significant number of boys join the school at other times, including those who have been excluded elsewhere and/or are particularly vulnerable. The school's work to accept, include and nurture these pupils is commendable.
- The school acts quickly to deal with any inappropriate use of technology by pupils. Leaders have prioritised prevention of this as an area of focus. This includes maintaining pupils' awareness of how to keep their personal information safe, including when they are offline.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are characteristically courteous and confident. The great majority of staff and parents surveyed for the inspection agreed that pupils' behaviour is at least good.
- The school's records show that the number of fixed-term exclusions has dropped substantially over the past year. The school's records also show that a small amount of low-level misbehaviour occurs during lessons, but pupils say that this is not the norm and that it rarely affects their learning. Conduct around the school is usually good, including at break and lunchtimes. A few pupils can be over-boisterous and occasionally require firm guidance. However, many more demonstrate that they are able to self-regulate their good behaviour.
- Pupils report that bullying is rare, and that when it does happen it is dealt with appropriately. Pupils state clearly that homophobic behaviour is completely unacceptable.
- Attendance is average, as are levels of persistent absence (which have reduced). As with outcomes, some differences remain in the attendance of different groups, such as White British boys. The school is well aware of these differences and works effectively with external agencies to promote good attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Overall, pupils join Year 7 with above-average results from their primary school tests. The 2016 GCSE examinations also saw an above-average proportion of pupils gaining five or more good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. This figure was the school's highest since the last inspection. Around a quarter of all GCSE passes were at grade A or A*.
- In 2016, the proportions of boys both entering examinations and gaining good passes in history, geography, sciences and languages were much higher than those nationally. Pupils made good progress in these subjects. Outcomes in music and drama were outstanding, with above-average numbers taking these subjects. All this demonstrates the breadth of the curriculum at William Ellis School.
- Notwithstanding these strengths, the 2016 results suggested some significant differences in progress between groups of pupils. For example, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (including the most able disadvantaged) and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities made less progress than other pupils nationally. Those with average and high prior attainment did not do as well as those with low prior attainment. Pupils' progress in English and mathematics was not as strong as it was in other subjects.

- Such differences were not significant in the 2015 results. Differences were decreasing in the performance of different groups, particularly between the most able disadvantaged and other pupils. Pupils' progress in English and mathematics had been above average for two years.
- Through data analysis and investigation, school leaders were able to understand and explain the 2016 results. Leaders are working hard to manage the curriculum changes in English and mathematics, providing additional support where it is needed.
- Information about and observation of current pupils' work show that while some differences remain between groups, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, pupils overall are making good progress. In particular, pupils in Year 9 make good progress across a range of subjects, reflecting the strength of the curriculum in key stage 3. Here, disadvantaged pupils are making at least as much progress as their peers.
- In 2016, examination results for a significant number of pupils were adversely affected by long-term absence or other issues beyond the school's control. A few pupils attended alternative provision, either part time or full time. The school has compelling evidence that most of these pupils obtained positive outcomes beyond examinations, including in their personal development and by obtaining apprenticeships or work placements.
- The proportion of 2016 Year 11 pupils not known to be in education, employment or training is low compared with the national figure.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is part of a local consortium. Students are based at one of the four schools as their 'home' school. They are taught across all four campuses, according to which subjects they take. The examination results published for William Ellis School are for those students for whom William Ellis is their 'home' school, regardless of where they are taught.
- The consortium arrangement offers Year 11 pupils at William Ellis a far broader range of sixth-form curriculum options than would otherwise be available in a small secondary school. It also offers them a chance to work and socialise with a greater range of students in a mixed-gender setting. This includes participation in cross-consortium extra-curricular activities.
- Arrangements for safeguarding sixth-form students are effective. Students wear lanyards and badges which identify their 'home' school, and attendance procedures are well established.
- The sixth form is well led through the strong consortium management structure. The overarching head of consortium works closely and effectively with the William Ellis head of sixth form to provide challenge and support. The chair of the William Ellis governing body is also chair of the consortium advisory group.

- As in the main school, the 2016 examination results showed some strengths but also some disappointments, including for the most able students. Leaders have taken decisive action with subjects that underperformed. The school's data indicates that current students are making good progress at A level, compared with their starting points. Current information also shows a more positive picture for disadvantaged students than in 2016.
- A small number of students join the sixth form without grades A* to C in English and mathematics. Some have already gained improved qualifications, and all are expected to do so.
- Sixth-form teaching at William Ellis is good. Lessons visited during the inspection demonstrated good student engagement in learning and solid working relationships. As in the main school, teachers' subject knowledge is secure and curriculum coverage is thorough. Students are clear about what they need to achieve for the next stages of their lives.
- Students are positive about the academic and pastoral support they receive. A thoughtful and relevant personal education is provided, including opportunities to discuss safety and extremism. Students report that advice about university applications and careers is plentiful. They also appreciate the supervised study and additional revision sessions offered by their teachers.
- All of the 2016 Year 13 cohort are in education, employment or training. Around two thirds went to university, around one in 10 took up apprenticeships and a similar number progressed to art foundation courses.

School details

Unique reference number	100056
Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	10023778

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	858
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Fiona Millar
Headteacher	Sam White
Telephone number	020 7267 9346
Website	www.williamellis.camden.sch.uk
Email address	info@williamellis.camden.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	October 2012

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average secondary comprehensive school for boys. Girls are admitted to the sixth form, which operates as part of a consortium with three other schools known as 'LaSwap'.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is significantly above average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well above average. Around half of all pupils speak English as an additional language.

- A small number of Year 7 places are reserved for pupils who show particular aptitude for music. These places are not awarded on the basis of prior attainment or examination success.
- A small number of pupils attend off-site provision, either for part of the week or full time. These placements include The Boxing Academy and Westminster Kingsway College.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school currently meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress at GCSE.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a range of lessons. In most cases, these visits were conducted jointly with the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team. Subject areas across the curriculum were visited and pupils from all year groups were observed.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, pastoral leaders, members of the governing body, the head of school improvement, a consultant from Camden local authority and parents.
- The inspection team considered 146 responses to Parent View. Many of these parents wrote additional comments to explain their responses. Inspectors also took account of 39 responses made to the staff survey which included the views of middle leaders, classroom teachers and support staff. No responses were made to the Ofsted pupils' questionnaire. However, two panels of Year 9 and Year 11 pupils met with inspectors, as did a panel of sixth-form students. Inspectors also spoke to pupils and students informally during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors looked at a large range of the school's day-to-day documentation. This included assessment information for current pupils and students, leaders' evaluation of the school's work and plans for improvement, minutes of meetings including those of the governing body, and information about attendance and behaviour. Inspectors checked the school's recruitment and personnel records, case studies and other information relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

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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.

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