

Highbury Fields School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	100455
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	376400
Inspection dates	18–19 January 2012
Lead inspector	Anne Wellham 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	735
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Lynas
Headteacher	Gladys Berry
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 March 2009
School address	Highbury Hill London N5 1AR
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Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	18–19 January 2012
Inspection Number	376400



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Introduction

Inspection team

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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 24 teachers teaching 25 lessons, of which three were joint observations with subject leaders; they also made a series of brief visits to another 19 lessons. Meetings were held with four groups of students, three members of the governing body and school staff including senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, looked at a wide range of documentation and analysed 216 parental questionnaires and others completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

The school is a smaller-than-average sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well-above average. The students come from a wide range of socio-economic, ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Most students are from minority ethnic groups, the largest being of Black African and Bangladeshi heritages. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much higher than that found nationally. While the proportions of disabled students and those with special educational needs are above average, the proportion with a statement of educational needs is below average. The school meets current floor standards (national minimum expectations for attainment and progress).

The school specialises in science. There is a small sixth form which is part of a large sixth form consortium with three other local schools. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has taken up post and there have been changes to the leadership structure, including the leadership of English, mathematics and science.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school where there has been a relentless focus on raising attainment during the last three years. There is a trend of improvement in the percentage of students gaining five GCSE results at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. The sixth form is good and students achieve well. It shows a similar trend of improvement. Most students make good or better progress. The achievement of a small number of students lags behind because low aspirations and regular, occasional absence prevent them from making the progress they are capable of.
- Teaching is mainly good with some examples of outstanding teaching. Despite the strengths of individual teachers, there are inconsistencies within and across subjects, particularly in the use of assessment, so that students' experience of learning often depends on who teaches the lesson. High expectations of students and their good habits for learning make a strong contribution to progress in lessons where teaching is satisfactory. The school provides high quality support for disabled students and those with special educational needs and those who face challenging circumstances. These students make the same good progress as their peers.
- The high levels of tolerance and respect that students show each other and staff are an exemplary feature of the school. Parents and carers raised concerns about incidents of poor behaviour disrupting lessons. Inspection evidence did not confirm this. Consistently good behaviour was observed in lessons and around the school and students and staff report that the management of behaviour is more rigorous than at the time of the last inspection.
- The headteacher, senior staff and the governing body have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have been effective in raising achievement since the last inspection. Middle leaders use well-developed systems to monitor and evaluate performance but they are not being used consistently enough to eliminate variations in the quality of teaching and

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learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of those students who are falling behind by improving their attendance and raising their aspirations.
- Ensure that middle leaders adopt a consistent approach to improving performance by:
 - taking action to improve the quality of marking and assessment across subjects so that all students receive high-quality written feedback on their work
 - sharing the features of good and outstanding practice and ensuring that these are applied within subjects to improve the consistency of students' learning
 - offering clear developmental feedback to teachers and other adults so that all teaching can be consistently good or better
 - reducing the variability in the progress of students within year groups by evaluating the impact of interventions more precisely.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

High expectations and a clear focus on developing the knowledge and skills students need to move on to the next level of attainment were key features of the learning observed during lessons. All students know their targets and the school tracks their progress rigorously. When students meet their targets they are adjusted to provide further challenge or if progress is too slow, targeted support is provided. This allows students to reach average standards of attainment from their low starting points and make good and sometimes outstanding progress. The majority of parents and carers agree that their children are making good progress.

The curriculum and teaching are focused precisely on students' emerging needs and revised accordingly. For example, higher-attaining students in Year 11 have been challenged to work at higher levels in mathematics since they were in Year 8. They are currently working at AS level, having achieved high grades in the GCSE examination after early entry. Lower- and middle-ability students at Key Stage 4, including disabled students and those with special educational needs, make better-than-expected progress because the curriculum has been broadened to include courses that are well matched to their needs and interests. Students known to be eligible for free school meals also achieve well and make the same good, and occasionally better, progress as that of their peers.

Effective strategies to improve the motivation and engage the interest of some Black Caribbean students, for example, by changing their learning environment and providing enrichment activities, are closing the gap between their attainment and

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that of all students nationally. Actions taken to improve the achievement of a minority of White British students are not so effective because of their poor attendance and low aspirations.

Many students enter the school with low-level skills in reading, writing and communication. The best teaching supports the development of these skills by precisely identifying students' needs and providing opportunities within lessons to practise and develop skills as part of the taught subject. In Years 10 and 11, reading and writing skills are developed well, but teaching does not always provide sufficient opportunities for extended writing or higher-level speaking and listening skills.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good overall, including in the sixth form. The responses from parents, carers and to inspection questionnaires reflect this. Students value the high quality of support they receive from teachers and the additional study and revision clubs provided for them. However, students report that not all teaching is of the same good standard and that a few teachers are not consistent in the way they give feedback or manage behaviour.

The best learning takes place when students are challenged to think for themselves and tasks are planned to develop their oral and literacy skills, whatever the subject content. They develop workplace skills and personal qualities well in lessons, where they are able to pose questions, work in groups and solve problems collaboratively. Students respond enthusiastically when they are given opportunities to participate in lessons. Sometimes they seek out ways to extend their own learning. For example, a Year 7 student studying Spanish decided to complete her homework in French as well because she wanted to use her prior knowledge.

In an outstanding lesson observed in English, the sequence of the tasks carefully built on students' developing knowledge to add depth to their understanding of the text. The teacher used skilful questioning to check learning at each stage of the lesson and encouraged students to extend their dialogue during their discussions to evaluate rather than just describe or comment. The marking of students' written work over an extended period of time contained detailed and informative feedback linked to the progression of their skills and knowledge. In an outstanding Spanish lesson, clear success and assessment criteria were shared with students and the lively and engaging delivery inspired students to take risks and formulate their own questions. Role play was used effectively to build the confidence and skills of all students.

Where teaching is not above satisfactory, learning activities are not matched well enough to the different needs of students and the key learning points are not consolidated clearly. As a result, some students find the work too hard or too easy so they do not all make the progress they are capable of. Teachers generally provide helpful verbal feedback during lessons and inform students about the progress they

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are making against their targets. However, the quality of written feedback varies considerably; some teachers rely on ticks or comments that focus on effort or presentation rather than providing regular, meaningful advice on how to sustain improvement.

The planned curriculum makes a good contribution to students' achievement and provides good opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students, including those in the sixth form, report unanimously that they feel safe in school and that they have a good understanding of the risks they may encounter both within and outside school. The different forms that bullying can take are understood by students and they express confidence in the prompt manner in which the school deals with the rare instances that occur. Most parents and carers' responses in the questionnaires confirm these views. Attendance is average overall. Actions taken to reduce persistent absence have been effective and fixed-term exclusions have reduced. The school monitors the attendance of all groups of students and a range of actions is taken to promote good attendance. The school has improved the attendance of Black African and Black Caribbean students, whose attendance has risen to be above average. There is less success in breaking down barriers to improving the attendance of some White British students.

Students' good behaviour in lessons and the support they provide for each other make a positive contribution to their learning. They have a clear understanding of the school rules, sanctions and rewards. Any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with effectively and students who struggle to control their own behaviour receive targeted support through interventions. Students feel secure enough to explore their emotions leading to negative behaviour and reflect on self-control and consider their choices and consequences of their actions. School data and reports from staff and students show that behaviour has improved over time with a reduction in exclusions and recorded instances of negative behaviour, including racist and homophobic bullying.

Leadership and management

Since the last inspection, the headteacher, governors and other leaders and managers, including leaders of the sixth form and the consortium, have focused successfully on raising achievement and improving the curriculum. Consequently, the school's capacity to improve further is good. The governing body challenges performance vigorously and has strong links with curriculum areas. The roles of middle leaders are sharply focused on monitoring students' academic progress and their personal and social development to contribute to a broader view of achievement. Subject leaders observe the quality of teaching and learning in their departments through formal observations and short visits to lessons. However, there is still some variability in how well they share outstanding practice and in the quality of feedback they provide to teachers and other adults on how to improve their

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performance. Year leaders regularly collect assessment data to track students' achievement against their individual targets and plan interventions. Despite this rigour, the precise impact of actions taken on students' outcomes is not recorded and evaluated systematically.

The school meets all the statutory requirements for safeguarding and the systems in place are coherent and effective. A strong commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination is at the heart of the school's work. As a result, the school is a harmonious environment where students from a very wide range of religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds work together and respect each other. The curriculum provides valuable opportunities for students to interact and work together, which support their good spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. Students are keen to discuss their learning and contribute well to the school community by participating in a wide range of clubs. Musical, artistic and sporting activities are particularly popular.

The school knows and understands the needs of students and their families and provides well-targeted care and support to help students make good progress whatever challenges they may face. Collaborative work with a range of external agencies, for example health and social services, promotes the health, welfare and behaviour of all students. Good guidance is provided for students when they transfer from primary school, when they choose options at the end of Years 9, 11 and 12 and for their future choices when they leave school. Nearly all students continue to education, employment or training. The school provides parents and carers with regular information on their children's progress and actively encourages them to engage with students' learning and celebrate the school's achievements.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



20 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Highbury Fields School, London N5 1AR

Thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We really enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking to you. Your school is providing you with a good education and helping you to make good progress in your learning. We were impressed with your good behaviour and the respect that you show to each other and the staff. The headteacher and senior staff lead your school well. They make sure that you are continually encouraged to have high expectations of yourselves and others.

The sixth form is an important part of the school and the students set an excellent example for younger students to follow. They benefit from the wide opportunities provided through the consortium.

You told us that you enjoy most of your lessons and learn a lot but you also told us about a few lessons where teaching is weaker so you learn less. We want the senior leaders, subject leaders and year leaders to make teaching more consistent by making sure that all teachers mark your work and provide high quality written feedback to tell you how to move on to the next level. We have asked them to learn from each other and help all teachers to be as good as the best. We have also asked the year leaders to make sure that the extra support you are given is effective. You can help by telling the teachers what makes you learn best.

Some of the parents and carers who completed questionnaires are concerned about the few students who do not always behave as well as everyone else. We visited a large number of lessons and saw good behaviour. The school's records and the students we talked to reported that good behaviour is typical and any bullying is rare. We were concerned when we found out that there are some students who do not come to school regularly and do not seem to realise how important it is to have a good education. You can all help by attending regularly and continuing to work hard.

We wish you all at Highbury Fields a happy and successful future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Wellham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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