

Highcrest Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133514
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	360524
Inspection dates	3–4 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Gale

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	774
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Thomas
Headteacher	Shena D Moynihan
Date of previous school inspection	31 October 2007
School address	Hatters Lane High Wycombe HP13 7NQ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 30 teachers in 30 lessons. Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and groups of students. Telephone conversations were also held with parents and carers. Inspectors looked at policies, data and analyses of data, the school's self-evaluation, minutes of governing body meetings, and 226 questionnaires completed by parents and carers. They also looked at questionnaires completed by staff and students.

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

- Whether the rise in attainment achieved in examination results in 2010 is being sustained for current cohorts.
- Whether teaching and other provision secure good progress for all groups of learners, particularly the more able and those studying English.
- The reasons for the rise in rates of progress and attainment in the sixth form in 2010.
- The quality of personal outcomes for students.
- The extent of remaining variability in the quality of learning across the curriculum and how this is related to the quality of leadership.

Information about the school

Highcrest Community School, a Fresh Start school in 2001, is a smaller-than-average non-selective school in a local authority which operates a selective secondary system. Consequently, attainment on entry for different year groups is between below and well-below average. The majority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest group being of Asian British heritage, representing approximately 32% of the school roll. Approximately 45% of students are of White British heritage. Approximately one third of students speak English as an additional language, with a small number at the early stages of English language acquisition. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is twice the national average. The range of needs includes behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, and moderate learning difficulties. The school is a specialist technology college and has gained many awards, including the Inclusion Quality Award, the Challenge Award and Investors in Families.

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

Highcrest Community School's overall effectiveness is outstanding. The school has rapidly improved in all areas of its work. This is reflected in one parental comment, typical of many, 'The school has gone from strength to strength and has helped my children reach their full potential. I would thoroughly recommend Highcrest to any parent.' Students' achievement is good and improving strongly and the school recently achieved its best ever GCSE examination results. Forty five per cent of students achieved five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics, compared to 37% in 2009. The proportion of students attaining five good GCSE grades increased from 52% to 81%. Progress and achievement in the sixth form have also been dramatically enhanced. These improvements have been achieved by a concerted and relentless drive from a committed staff to secure the best possible provision for their students.

- Inclusion is a core mission for the school and consequently care, guidance and support are exemplary. One student, typifying the view of many others, reported that 'student well-being is paramount' at Highcrest. Highly-tailored individual support helps students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to make outstanding progress. Pastoral care for any student experiencing difficulties is outstanding.
- Students are extremely proud of their school and make an excellent contribution to it and to the wider community. All students, including those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, have an excellent understanding of, and make, healthy choices. The school is an exceptionally harmonious place and students from all cultural and religious backgrounds behave very considerately to each other. This exemplifies their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Systems to monitor and track students' progress are rigorous and highly effective. Target setting is exceptionally challenging and effective and leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of how well students are doing. They are able to respond quickly to support any students at risk of not fulfilling their potential. A comprehensive range of intervention strategies accelerates the achievement of students, building on good progress in lessons.
- The school is extremely vigilant in monitoring the progress of different groups of learners and, as a result, gaps in achievement are rare and, where identified, quickly remedied.
- The curriculum is carefully designed for the range of students at Highcrest and is excellent at meeting their needs. The well-organised core of subjects is very effectively enhanced with an appropriate range of additional courses and flexible days. This is a significant contributor in ensuring that all students leave school with accredited qualifications.

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- The school's specialist status as a technology college has had a significant impact in raising achievement through, for example, supporting staff development.
- The headteacher's inspirational leadership, with able support from her leadership team, provides clear focus on securing the best outcomes for students. Staff morale is very high and all are committed to driving improvement. Self-evaluation is exceptionally rigorous and has led to very significant improvements to the quality of provision and achievement. This demonstrates the school's outstanding capacity to further improve.

However, the determined headteacher and her team are always striving to raise attainment. They recognise that while many areas of the school's work are outstanding there are further improvements that could be made.

- While most teaching is at least good in the school and a minority of lessons are outstanding, a few lessons remain satisfactory. Lower ability students are almost always well catered for, but occasionally assessment information is not used well enough to plan challenging activities for more-able students. In a few lessons, opportunities are missed to develop students' learning and thinking skills through challenging questioning and activities which encourage them to take risks, formulate and test hypotheses, and work together to solve problems.
- Oral feedback to students is a strength at Highcrest. Students report that teachers are exceptionally generous with their time. However, the quality of written feedback is inconsistent.
- Progress in English has been slower than the exceptional progress found in mathematics. The school has acted swiftly to address this imbalance through changes to the leadership structure and a whole-school focus on literacy. This has resulted in rising attainment. However, attainment remains lower in English than it is in mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment in English to match that in mathematics.
- Increase the proportion of lessons securing outstanding progress across the curriculum, particularly for the more able, by:
 - ensuring teachers consistently use assessment information to plan challenging learning activities for the full range of student abilities
 - enhancing the quality of teachers' questioning to challenge all students and develop their thinking
 - extending opportunities to develop students' skills as independent learners through increasing opportunities for them to take risks, formulate and test hypotheses and work together to solve challenging problems
 - ensuring that teachers' marking is completed to a consistently high standard and has a clear rationale that facilitates faster progress by students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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- Students make at least good, and often outstanding, progress in the large majority of lessons, where they are given engaging and challenging learning activities which provide opportunities for team-working and reflection. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, students worked well together to assess and improve their own work using clear success criteria. In a Year 8 physical education lesson, students enjoyed working in groups to demonstrate and peer-assess new physical skills and made rapid progress as a result. When teachers talk for too long in introductions or tasks are less stimulating, students can become too passive and lose focus on the learning.
- Students are fully aware of the school's behaviour policy and say this has had a 'real impact' on securing the consistently good behaviour observed in lessons and the very calm and respectful behaviour seen around the school.
- Students' progress over time is good overall. The most recent Year 11 cohort showed excellent progress for lower and middle ability students and satisfactory progress for the smaller more able group. The school has recognised the need to secure faster progress for the more able and is working to support this group through enhanced extra-curricular activities and increased challenge in lessons. As a result, current able students are making faster progress and say they welcome the opportunities provided.
- The school has worked hard to improve attendance with the result that attendance is now above average. Flexible curriculum days extend opportunities to develop students' skills as independent learners and improve cross-curricular skills in literacy and information and communication technology (ICT). This, together with broadly average and rising attainment, results in good preparation for students' future economic well-being.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
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	2
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 contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

- The large majority of teaching is at least good and often better. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and plan appropriate activities for learners. Relationships are very good throughout this small school and students report being well supported in lessons by staff. Other adults' support is well focused in the classroom and makes a good contribution to the progress made by students. For example, in a science lesson, a trainee teacher was well deployed assisting students with the technical vocabulary used in the lesson.
- In good and outstanding lessons, students make good and better gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding because teachers provide stimulating and challenging learning activities and are mindful of individuals' prior attainment and specific learning needs. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson, students made good gains in their learning because appropriate activities had been tailored for different students in the class based on individual need. However, such practice is not yet universal and in a few lessons students attempt the same task regardless of ability. This can result in lack of challenge for the most able.
- The school makes very good use of assessment data to track students' progress against challenging targets and intervene where necessary to achieve them. As a result, most students are on track to achieve or exceed their targets.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

- The curriculum is broad and balanced with a core curriculum closely tailored to individuals’ needs. Memorable experiences are provided, and cross-curricular learning enhanced, through seven flexidays where students undertake thematic learning. The curriculum is carefully customised for different groups by curricular and extra-curricular activities. For example, a supplementary school operates on the school site for students who speak English as an additional language, boosting their achievement. A greatly appreciated breakfast club operates for gifted and talented students. A wide range of vocational courses are also offered. Partly as a result of curriculum adaptation, the numbers of qualifications and grades students achieve are rising.
- Care, guidance and support are exemplary. Vulnerable students are very well supported and achieve well. They feel well cared for and say the school clearly wants the best for them. Tailored interventions are in place and all students are carefully tracked to ensure their progress does not falter. Transition arrangements are very strong from primary school and good links are bolstered by language teaching to Year 6 and by the specialism helping to deliver technology at Key Stage 2.

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?

- Leaders and managers, including governors, are extremely aspirational for their students and utterly determined all should achieve their best. They have successfully secured key improvements to students’ achievement and other outcomes. Staff at all levels share the headteacher’s determination to secure outstanding achievement for all groups of students. Robust line management arrangements ensure that all leaders are held to account and any relative underachievement in subjects is rapidly addressed.
- Robust actions to improve the proportion of good or better teaching have had a clear impact over time. Leaders and managers have a very secure understanding of the quality and consistency in the school through regular, accurate observation. Carefully targeted staff training has helped teachers improve their practice and they are carefully tracked over time. Consequently, leaders are well aware that lesson planning does not always utilise the wealth of assessment data to plan for the full range of abilities and that, for some teachers, challenging questioning is still developing. Further training is planned to improve these elements of teaching.

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

- Monitoring and evaluation procedures are extremely secure at all levels. A well-informed team of governors plays a very effective role in supporting the school, while holding leaders and managers to account.
- Strategies to promote equality of opportunity and tackle discrimination are highly effective. Leaders are alert to any variation in achievement between different groups of learners.
- The school has an excellent understanding of its own community. Good strategies are in place to celebrate the rich diversity of the school and local community. Global links are well established.
- Staff are extremely rigorous in ensuring that students remain safe. Leaders and managers are acutely aware of all risks and work very pro-actively to mitigate them.

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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

- Relationships between staff and students are very strong in the sixth form. Students state that the 'fantastic' guidance and support they receive in the main school continues in the sixth form and is a key factor when choosing to continue their studies in the sixth form. Retention rates are good, with most students completing their studies successfully.
- Attainment has risen in the sixth form every year in its four-year history and its overall effectiveness has improved so that it is now good. The most recent cohort made much faster progress than its predecessors to achieve well, considering the starting points. Attainment was close to the national average.

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- There is a broad range of academic and vocational courses for students to choose from in this relatively small sixth form, although this choice narrows slightly in Year 13. Teaching is good and students learn well across the curriculum.
- Overall, the good provision on offer in the sixth form leads to good, and improving, outcomes for students.
- Leadership of the sixth form demonstrates a clear and ambitious approach to growing this aspect of the school's work. Leaders have been very effective in planning and delivering improvement in the sixth form. Tighter monitoring of students' performance, raising entry requirements to match students to the academic needs of courses and focused support for individual teachers and departments have all led to dramatic improvements in outcomes for students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers are exceptionally happy with the school. Almost all agree with all statements on the questionnaire. A small number think that the school does not help their child to have a healthy lifestyle, that their suggestions and concerns are not taken account of, or that school does not always deal effectively with poor behaviour. Inspectors found that behaviour was good overall and in lessons, and exemplary around the school. They found that the school provides many ways to encourage physical exercise, supports the development of emotional and sexual health well, and ensures healthy lunch options are available. Overall, students' adoption of healthy lifestyles is excellent. Parents and carers spoken to by telephone said that they were very happy with all of the school's work and particularly praised the speed and ease of communication with the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Highcrest Community School 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 226 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 774 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	66	29	146	65	8	4	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	78	35	143	63	2	1	1	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	86	38	128	57	6	3	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	81	36	135	60	4	2	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	74	33	142	63	3	1	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	27	146	65	16	7	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	46	20	153	68	18	8	4	2
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	35	128	57	8	4	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	69	31	135	60	13	6	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	83	37	124	55	13	6	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	48	21	152	67	13	6	4	2
The school is led and managed effectively	84	37	128	57	7	3	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	95	42	119	53	8	4	4	2

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



5 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Highcrest Community School, High Wycombe HP13 7NQ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to inspectors when we recently visited your school. Here are our main inspection findings.

- Your school is outstanding. Year 11 students last year made good progress overall and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities made outstanding progress to achieve the school's best ever examination results. ♦
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding and you tell us that the school looks after you exceptionally well. As a result, you feel extremely safe, are able to contribute exceptionally well to the school and local community, and adopt outstandingly healthy lifestyles.
- The curriculum is excellent in ensuring that you can choose courses which meet your needs and interests well and help you to attain good qualifications.
- The school monitors your progress very carefully to ensure that extra help can be provided if you fall behind.
- Students learning English for the first time receive excellent specialist support to help improve their skills.
- Your attendance is improving and is now above average for secondary schools.
- You behave well in lessons, normally concentrating hard, and you behave in an exemplary way towards each other around the site. Your tolerance of, and sensitivity towards, others demonstrate your excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

To help ensure that all groups make outstanding progress, we have asked staff to improve on the good quality teaching you receive by:

- making sure that lessons are closely matched to your different abilities, challenge you and give you more opportunities to develop skills as independent learners.
- ensuring that all teachers give you high quality written feedback that you can act on to improve your progress.

We have also asked that they raise levels of attainment in English to match those in mathematics. You can help by maintaining your good attendance and always focusing on your learning in class.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector

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