

The Heath School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111400
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	356905
Inspection dates	22–23 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Ruth James HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1080
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Ainsworth
Headteacher	Mrs Heather Mullaney
Date of previous school inspection	21 November 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 31 lessons, and the same number of teachers were seen. Meetings were held with groups of students, one governor, and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at lesson observation records, development plans, and documentation about safeguarding and support arrangements. They also analysed the results of 125 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How well different groups of students achieve, especially higher- and lower-ability boys.
- How good the quality of teaching is, especially in subjects with weaker performance, including the teaching of higher-ability students.
- How effective the curriculum is in meeting the needs and aspirations of all students, including reluctant learners.
- How effective leaders and managers are at all levels in raising achievement.

Information about the school

The school is larger than most secondary schools. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Most students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally, but the number with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The school has specialist status for technology and is a leadership partnership school. It has gained a number of awards including the Inclusion Quality Mark, Healthy Schools status, Artsmark Silver award, International Schools award and Investors in People Champion.

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

The Heath is a truly outstanding school. Led by the inspirational headteacher and an exceptionally focused senior leadership team, the school has achieved standards of attainment which are very high. Students' learning and progress over time are now outstanding, because of the very high quality of teaching in lessons and the outstanding support they receive.

Following a slight dip in boys' achievement in 2009, all groups of students now achieve extremely well. Almost all students gained five or more GCSE A* to C grades in 2010 and standards rose in virtually every respect, including the overall proportion of A and A* grades. However, the number of A* grades was low in a few subjects.

The curriculum has the breadth and flexibility to meet the needs of all students extremely effectively. A wide choice of courses is offered, including a good range of technology subjects in keeping with specialist status. Extra-curricular opportunities are also excellent. Outstanding care and guidance ensure that students follow courses that meet their individual abilities and aspirations, and that they are strongly supported through the process. Students' success as learners is complemented by their outstanding attitudes and skills that will serve them well beyond school. They are courteous, articulate, and treat each other and adults with consideration. They respond to challenges, such as the opportunity to be part of the Junior Leadership Team, with confidence. They enjoy their own and other people's successes.

Governors, leaders, managers and staff all share an ambitious vision for the school's continuing development. Self-evaluation is thorough, accurate and self-critical. Persuasive leadership by the headteacher drives the school forward relentlessly through a constant and constructive cycle of monitoring, evaluation and development. The impact of recent strategies to improve the quality of teaching has ensured that teaching is now outstanding overall with very little that is less than good. The effective senior leadership team is strongly supported by management at all levels so that the capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of A* grades at GCSE by making better use of assessment data to plan challenging work for higher-ability students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' attainment is high and has been well above average for two of the past three years. From broadly average starting points students make rapid progress to reach high

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standards. In 2010, this applied to all the key measures, such as the proportion gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Exceptionally high proportions of students are successful in obtaining two or more GCSE A* to C grades (or equivalent) in sciences. The proportion gaining an A* to C grade in a modern foreign language increased significantly in 2010. The standards reached by students known to be in receipt of free school meals are higher than comparable national figures. Learning and progress are excellent for all groups of students. The slight dip in boys' achievement in 2009 has been fully addressed and boys of all abilities did extremely well in 2010. Although the overall number of GCSE A* and A grades increased significantly in 2010 the number of A* grades remains low in a minority of subjects, including science and technology.

In lessons, students are keen to do well, and demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning. They participate enthusiastically in learning activities and take pride in their work. Staff know well how to support the students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and sensitively help those with behavioural and emotional difficulties to develop personally and keep up with their work. This high quality care enables these students to make progress that is as good as their peers.

Students value each other's views and beliefs. Bullying is rare and dealt with effectively. Students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is evident in their excellent behaviour, the respect shown to adults and their peers, and their thoughtful approach to opportunities for reflection on a range of issues. Exclusions are extremely rare. Students contribute extremely well to the school and local community. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their excellent attendance.

Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and participate enthusiastically in extra-curricular sports activities.

The very inclusive nature of the school is demonstrated by the excellent outcomes for all groups of students. One parent summed this up as follows: 'All talents and skills are encouraged by The Heath, not just academic ability, producing rounded children and building self-esteem.'

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
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	1
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	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
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?

Teaching is outstanding overall. Very little teaching that was less than good was seen by inspectors, and about one third of the lessons observed were outstanding.

One example of an outstanding drama lesson involved Year 10 students exploring the concept of contrasts and effects on an audience. Within thirty minutes, they had listened to their inspirational teacher with rapt attention, considered a Brecht quote, participated enthusiastically in an active warm-up that required close attention to instructions, given thoughtful considered responses to a short but emotive presentation with contrasting music and images, and engaged very well in a carefully planned group activity. This typifies teachers' excellent use of time and the variety of interesting and motivational learning activities used in the best lessons.

Teachers are adept at establishing supportive, encouraging relationships which foster an excellent climate for learning. Rare incidents of minor misbehaviour are quickly dealt with in a firm and authoritative but unobtrusive manner. There is a culture of high expectations, and this is so successfully communicated to students' that they set high standards for themselves and others. As a result, their excellent behaviour and attitudes contribute very well to their learning.

School systems to support learning are very strong and students' overall progress is monitored and tracked carefully. Good use is made of individual targets and assessment information, and most teaching meets most individual needs most of the time. However,

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on occasion, assessment information is not used to best effect to ensure that activities are appropriately challenging for all students, especially the most able, so that the very highest standards are reached.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a wide range of pathways to meet the needs of all its students. Leaders continuously evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. Work-related learning is strong. Increasing numbers of students are taking three science GCSEs and the alternative vocational science course provides an engaging and relevant experience for others. Uptake of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4 is increasing. All students study a technology subject, in keeping with specialist status. Individual arrangements are made to meet specific needs where mainstream provision is not appropriate. The wide choice of extra-curricular activities available, particularly sports, ensures that there are opportunities for all.

Pastoral support is sensitive, well coordinated and very effective in promoting the well-being of students. The school has excellent processes to identify those in need of additional support, provide the help they need and monitor their progress carefully. Individual personal and academic targets for vulnerable students are clear and precise and help them to see the excellent progress they are making. The very wide range of support strategies includes learning mentors, a school counsellor, a behaviour unit, and peer mentoring. These ensure that very high quality support is given to all groups of students. Students speak confidently about the help they have received from the Centre for Student Intervention for different sorts of problems. Comprehensive transition arrangements ensure that younger pupils settle in quickly. Advice for students is very effective and almost all progress to further education, training or employment when they leave school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
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?

Leadership and management at all levels are outstanding. The headteacher leads a highly effective team of senior colleagues who are united in their determination to drive improvement. Their exceptionally thorough and focused approach, centred on raising achievement and offering the highest quality provision, ensures that no weakness is overlooked and the school is exceptionally successful in meeting its aims. All aspects of the school's work are scrutinised and areas for improvement rigorously pursued, but within a supportive framework for staff. The leadership partner specialisation has enabled the school to seek and provide outstanding training for colleagues within the school and from schools elsewhere. Middle leaders have embraced the outstanding training opportunities offered and are themselves providing strong, effective leadership that is

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constantly pushing up standards. The governing body provides good support. There is a strong feeling of partnership in all that the school strives to achieve. Parents and carers appreciate this; they receive good quality feedback about students' progress. There is a keen sense of fairness in the way that the school promotes equal opportunities for all groups of students and works effectively with all support agencies. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and are extremely thorough. Community cohesion is promoted well and students understand and respect other cultures. There are some outstanding international links established and developments to improve understanding of more diverse British communities are planned. This is a school that provides outstanding value for money.

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	2
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	1

Views of parents and carers

Of those parents and carers who returned the questionnaire, the very large majority were very supportive of the school. The great majority feel the school keeps them well informed about their children's progress and keeps their children safe. Similarly, most believe the school meets individual needs well and prepares their children well for the future. These results concur with inspection findings. A few parents and carers raised concerns about the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors found that behaviour is excellent and the school's systems for managing behaviour work very well. Interviews with students confirmed that this is the case. A few parents and carers do not feel the school helps them to support their child's learning. A very small number of parents made comments about specific issues including uniform, lack of homework and lack of parents' evenings with subject teachers. Parents and carers made several very positive comments about aspects of support.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Heath 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 125 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1080 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	46	37	70	56	5	4	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	54	43	67	54	4	3	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	48	38	68	54	3	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	46	37	71	57	5	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	37	30	80	64	5	4	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	26	73	58	15	12	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	18	87	70	9	7	3	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)	35	28	76	61	6	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	30	78	62	5	4	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	43	34	66	53	12	10	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	27	22	75	60	10	8	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	42	34	73	58	8	6	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	52	42	67	54	5	4	1	1

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.



24 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Heath School, Runcorn, WA7 4SY

Thank you for your warm welcome when we inspected your school and for telling us about it.

We found that your school is outstanding. You and your parents and carers told us that you really enjoy school and feel extremely safe. It is a very friendly school. You get on exceptionally well with each other and with staff, and your behaviour is excellent. Your high level of attendance helps you to do well. Many of you make a very valuable contribution to the school, for example, as school councillors, peer mentors and junior leaders. You know how to stay healthy and many of you participate in the excellent range of extra-curricular sporting activities.

Staff look after you extremely well and provide excellent support for those of you who need extra help. You benefit from outstanding teaching, which enables all of you to make outstanding progress and achieve very high standards in your work, and excellent examination results. The range of subjects and courses to choose from in Key Stage 4 meets your needs and aspirations extremely well and you receive high quality advice and guidance for the next step in your school life and career.

Through their excellent teamwork, the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff have improved the school. They know how to make it even better. We have asked them to continue with this work to ensure that even more of you obtain the highest possible A* grades at GCSE.

We are confident that you will continue to work hard and do your best and we wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector

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