

# The Hemel Hempstead School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117500
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	358147
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 March 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paula Heaney HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1149
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	240
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Bob Harbour
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sandra Samwell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6 February 2008
<b>School address</b>	Heath Lane Hemel Hempstead HP1 1TX
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 39 lessons and saw 38 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, members of the governing body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation, including 152 questionnaires from parents and 250 from students.

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

- Why did middle ability girls make less progress than their peers in 2010?
- To what extent do the effectiveness and consistency of teaching and support across subjects enable students to make the progress of which they are capable?
- In the sixth form, why are students not making better progress than the data would indicate?

## Information about the school

The Hemel Hempstead School is a large, over-subscribed school with a specialism in the performing arts since 2002. Recently the school has expanded its specialist status to include science and mathematics and gifted and talented. Most students are from White British backgrounds. The school has slightly more girls than boys. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as is the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school's focus is on the percentage of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C including English and mathematics. The school holds a range of awards including the Artsmark and Sportsmark Gold awards, Healthy Schools and Investors in People.

The school sixth form is part of the West Dacorum Partnership, a consortium of four secondary schools and a college. In 2010, 86 students took courses at the school and 36 from the school took courses at other partnership providers.

**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?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

The Hemel Hempstead School is a good school where students' achievement is outstanding. This is because students make good progress as the result of good quality teaching and learning in most of their lessons. The majority of students enter the school with above average starting points and receive good support by teachers and other members of staff to achieve of their best. Most lessons are interesting, challenging and meet the needs of different groups of students. However, inspectors found that in a small minority of lessons this was not the case. In the less effective lessons, for example those dominated by the teacher, where students work predominantly from a text book, or copy from the board, students can lose interest and do not achieve to their potential. In some cases good behaviour can deteriorate.

Results in most subjects are well above the national average and particularly so in English. A high proportion of students not only continue with subjects from the school's main specialism of performing arts into Years 10 and 11, but also continue with a modern foreign language achieving high standards. The proportion of students gaining high grades at GCSE is above the national average. Support for students, particularly the most vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. The school works hard to identify ways to help and support those at risk of underachieving. Inspectors agreed with parents' concerns that work in students' books and files was not marked sufficiently regularly or in detail, to help them improve.

Leadership and management are good, and satisfactory in the sixth form. Leaders, managers and the governing body have a clear understanding of the strengths of the school and what needs to be done to improve further, although their evaluation of performance was over-generous in a number of areas. Actions are underway to ensure a more consistent approach to monitoring and evaluating students' and staff performance in order to raise standards and progress further.

Equality of opportunity is good. The school compares the performance of different groups of learners closely and has identified why girls of middle ability underperformed in 2010. Safeguarding is good. The vast majority of students and parents agree. While inspectors saw evidence of improvements in the school's own analysis of students' performance, it is too early to judge the overall impact, particularly in the sixth form. The school has good capacity to improve further and value for money is good.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that more lessons are consistently of a good or better quality and include a range of activities that challenge and interest students sufficiently, by sharing good

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teaching practice more effectively across departments, and so enable students of differing abilities to make the progress of which they are capable.

- Ensure that students' work in their books and files are marked regularly and that comments and feedback on their work and in reports are sufficiently detailed in order to:
  - help students improve
  - encourage them to achieve to their potential
  - inform parents of the progress students are making more fully.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the management actions already underway in the sixth form to improve students' progress and raise attainment further across GCE A level subjects.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Students' examination results at GCSE are consistently high with most students gaining five GCSEs grade A\*-C and three quarters gaining five good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. Achievement in English is particularly high with around a third of students gaining A\*-A grades. Most students on vocational courses achieve well above the national average. Just under a half of the students studied a modern foreign language in Year 11 and their achievement was also above the national average.

Students enter the school with prior achievement that is largely above the national average. They make good progress overall as in most lessons activities are carefully designed to interest and challenge students to work to their potential, developing confidence and independence. Students enjoy these lessons, particularly when teachers incorporate their views on how they learn best. School leaders recognise that in spite of individually targeted support in 2010, a number of girls did not achieve to their potential. School data indicate actions to improve the performance of students at risk of underachieving are having a positive impact, such as the change to a modular examined GCSE mathematics in 2011, although it is too early to comment on their success. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress as a result of the good quality support and encouragement they receive.

These are the other features of students' outcomes.

Students say they feel safe in and around the school.

Behaviour is mostly good in lessons and students work very well together.

A good proportion of students take part in arts and sport activities outside lessons and recognise how participation in these helps to develop their fitness.

Performing arts events and the link with a school in South Africa enable students to contribute to the school and wider community enthusiastically.

Attendance is improving and is good.

Work-related skills are explored through a range of additional activities, such as 'Arts Week' and 'Science Week', where students are encouraged to develop problem-solving and team-working skills.

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Students show a good appreciation of the beliefs of others and a good understanding of groups other than themselves.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	1
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	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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 lessons seen by inspectors were of good quality and a quarter were judged to be outstanding. Teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge, particularly when questioning students, enabling them to broaden their understanding and knowledge well. Relationships between teachers and students are generally very positive, fostering productive relationships and promoting learning very effectively. Teachers encourage students in lessons so that they are confident and engage well in discussions. Lessons are planned well to include an interesting range of tasks and activities which build on previous learning and secure understanding. Students have good opportunities to collaborate with and learn from each other. Teachers' questioning is often skilful, involving students in reflecting on the reasons for their contributions and opinions to ensure they have fully grasped key concepts before moving on.

Too many lessons were dominated by the teacher talking, preventing independent learning, exploration and reasoning. In these lessons learning and assessment activities were not matched sufficiently well to individual needs. Students told inspectors they did not find these lessons interesting or sufficiently challenging. Inspectors found that in less effective lessons students' sometimes behaved less well as they became bored or were not

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challenged sufficiently. Inspectors found that marking of students' work in their workbooks and files was not consistently regular or informative to help them improve. A significant proportion of comments from parents raised concerns in this regard.

The school provides a wide range of GCSE courses, including single sciences, and vocational routes such as in the performing arts, music technology and in sport. Students are encouraged to choose course options in Year 9 in which they will succeed and most are encouraged to continue with a modern foreign language. Literacy and numeracy skills are developed well through the respective GCSE subjects and the school is reviewing provision in information and communication technology (ICT) to ensure students in Years 10 and 11 who do not choose this as a GCSE option develop appropriate skills to prepare them for future employment. Students value highly the wide range of extra-curricular activities available particularly in performing arts, with a significant proportion following GCSE courses in these subjects after school on Wednesdays.

Arrangements for the care of students, and particularly the more vulnerable, are effective with some striking examples where the school has supported students with significant difficulties successfully to overcome these and make good progress. The 'house' system fosters a strong sense of belonging between students very effectively. Students receive good quality advice and guidance to help them progress to university.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The senior leadership team work well together. They are keen to raise standards and they share their vision effectively with staff. Management systems have been refined since the last inspection, especially in the last two years. The school's use of data to track students' progress is now being applied consistently across all departments. In the last year, initiatives to introduce common approaches across departments are helping to reduce variation between the work and outcomes of different subjects. As a result, middle managers adopt common systems in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. This is bringing about a more coherent picture of the school's strengths and areas for development, better informing evaluation and future planning. As these initiatives are relatively new, their impact in raising standards further has yet to be realised fully. Continuing professional development for teachers has an appropriately strong emphasis for the school in its drive to improve quality and it is linked carefully to monitoring and performance management outcomes to raise achievement. Although self-evaluation is carried out systematically and the school has a good understanding of its priorities, the school graded itself more positively in a number of areas.

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The governing body plays a significant role in the school. Governors offer substantial expertise and time and are committed to influencing the school's development. They consider options for the school's future seriously and scrutinise the work of the school carefully. In some, but not all areas, they offer appropriate challenge and help the school build valuable partnerships to improve provision. The school has well-developed links and partnerships with local and more distant schools, a local further education college and other groups. This supports its development of community cohesion well but the school recognises that a more strategic approach is needed to address more comprehensively areas of religious, ethnic and social differences to enhance provision further, and further involve parents and carers.

Leaders and managers keep detailed records of the progress of students by ability and ethnic background and takes action to address any underperformance, such as with a number of middle ability girls in 2010. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The school takes every precaution to keep the site safe and provides good quality training for all staff who come into contact with students. Safe working practices are highlighted across the curriculum. The school works closely and effectively with all relevant safeguarding agencies.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Examination results in the sixth form are around the national average, although performance between subjects varies. Students make satisfactory progress based on their starting points, although in 2010 achievement in geography and dance was good. The school raised the entry requirements for specific subjects in September 2009, although the impact of this change will not be known until the outcomes of the 2011 examinations.

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School data indicate that students' progress has improved. Students' attendance, particularly in Year 13, has improved significantly and is now good.

A significant proportion of sixth form students make an outstanding contribution to the well-being of the wider school, through opportunities such as leading dance groups and other performance activities, sports ambassador roles and team-leading sessions across the school on work-related weeks. The school ensures students in the sixth form develop high quality personal skills to prepare them well for university and the next stage in their lives. A high proportion progress to university.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and improving. A broad range of GCE A level subjects are available at the school with photography, law and media studies available at consortium partner schools. Intermediate level courses are available at a partner school or at the local further education college. A small range of vocational courses are available at advanced level. The wide range of subjects meets most students' needs.

The new leadership team in place since September 2010 has sufficient drive and ambition to secure improvements. Leaders and staff share a common vision to raise standards and improve progress. Appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes are now in place but have yet to have sufficient impact across all subjects. Staff are engaging well with students, parents and carers and other providers in the partnership helping to improve outcomes.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

The large majority of parents are generally supportive of the school. Although a small minority of parents responded to the questionnaire, a significant proportion of those who provided comments raised concerns including the consistency of good quality teaching, how the school helped them to support their child's learning with particular reference to the lack of marking and having more opportunities to discuss and review progress, and the visibility of the head teacher around the school.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Hemel Hempstead 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 152 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1389 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	60	39	77	51	15	10	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	60	39	85	56	4	3	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	58	38	80	53	11	7	3	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	70	46	56	37	21	14	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	56	37	79	52	10	7	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	45	30	69	45	27	18	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	19	92	61	23	15	1	1
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)	36	24	78	51	18	12	5	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	58	38	70	46	18	12	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	44	29	75	49	28	18	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	35	23	72	47	25	16	6	4
The school is led and managed effectively	69	45	45	30	14	9	19	13
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	77	51	52	34	17	11	4	3

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



18 March 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of The Hemel Hempstead School, Hemel Hempstead, HP1 1TX**

I would like to thank you for your friendliness and courtesy during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions. Your behaviour is good in most lessons. Your attendance is improving and is now good.

The inspection found that yours is a good school, with a satisfactory sixth form. GCSE examination results are high overall, particularly in English. In the sixth form examination results are in line with national averages. Teaching and learning are good in most lessons, but a small minority of lessons do not meet your interests or needs fully. You have a wide range of subject choices and activities to help you progress in the future. In the sixth form you have outstanding opportunities to develop leadership skills. The support you receive to make the progress expected of you is good. Leadership and management in the school are good, and satisfactory in the sixth form.

We have asked the school to do the following.

Increase the proportion of good and better lessons across subjects and departments to ensure that you all make the progress of which you are capable.

Ensure the work you produce is marked regularly and consistently across departments and that the comments you receive are helpful to you so you can improve further and so your parents are better informed of the progress you are making.

Continue with and evaluate the impact of the management actions to improve provision in the school and in the sixth form to raise attainment and the progress you make further.

You can all help by telling teachers how you learn best, by behaving well at all times, and by continuing to attend regularly.

Yours sincerely

Paula Heaney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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