

Highfield Humanities College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119732
Local Authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	358616
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sally Kenyon 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	1099
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Lilly Henderson
Headteacher	Mr Ian Evans
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 33 lessons, taught by 33 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with two representatives of the governing body, the school improvement partner, a representative from the local authority, senior school staff, middle leaders, teachers, support staff and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at samples of students' work in lessons across a wide range of subjects and different year groups. Inspectors looked in detail at documents relating to the school's monitoring of its performance and undertook a detailed analysis of students' attainment and progress. They also scrutinised minutes of meetings, improvement plans and safeguarding procedures. The responses from parents and carers on 110 questionnaires were considered, together with replies from staff and students.

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

- The progress and attainment for all groups of students, particularly students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and boys.
- The quality of teaching and assessment.
- Whether the curriculum is meeting the needs of all students.
- The quality of leadership and management at all levels, particularly in improving areas of weakness.

Information about the school

Highfield Humanities College is a larger than average secondary school in Blackpool. It is a Specialist Humanities College. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is just below the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and whose first language is not believed to be English are well below the national average. The school's deprivation indicator is broadly average. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average and those with a statement of special educational needs is above the national average.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Highfield Humanities College provides a satisfactory standard of education. The headteacher sets high expectations and ensures that the health, safety and well-being of students are a high priority. Since the last inspection, all aspects of the school's work have improved. Students join the school with a wide range of abilities and standards on entry are in line with the national average. Standards are significantly below average but improving quickly and securely. Students' progress is satisfactory overall. However in subjects where teaching is stronger, for example, religious education and French, students achieve significantly higher standards than are found nationally.

The very large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire are satisfied with their child's progress. They appreciate the good quality of pastoral care. This was evident during the inspection, particularly towards those students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Students work well with the local community and raise significant sums for local, national and international charities.

The quality of teaching and assessment are satisfactory. Improved use of data to inform lesson planning ensures satisfactory progress through the school and the majority of lessons seen at Key Stage 3 showed good progress. The curriculum is a strength of the school, particularly for those students who choose to take more vocational pathways in partnership with local training providers and colleges. The overwhelming majority of these students continue in education, employment or training when they leave school. The Humanities Specialism has a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school through the 'transforming learning' group. Inspectors saw some innovative examples of teaching through different strategies in larger groups. Students report that they enjoy this type of learning in the environment designed to imitate that of the new school.

The senior leadership team holds a broadly accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses within the school. However, self-evaluation is not consistently rigorous enough, nor are staff held sufficiently to account to secure rapid improvement in outcomes for all students. The school sets challenging targets for students. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body and staff are committed to raising standards and the school benefits from the good support of the local authority. Because of the steady improvement made since the last inspection in all aspects of its work, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to sustain continued improvement and provides satisfactory value for money.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment at Key Stage 4, particularly in English, mathematics and science by:
 - increasing the level of pace and challenge in all lessons.
- Continue to improve the quality of teaching by:
 - sharing the best practice currently in the school
 - increasing opportunities for students' independent learning.
- Improve the rigour of school self-evaluation by:
 - checking thoroughly that agreed actions are fully implemented
 - evaluating the impact of agreed actions against the outcomes achieved by students
 - strengthening the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning
 - holding staff accountable for the outcomes achieved by students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Although attainment is low, it is rising rapidly. Inspection evidence, including current assessment information, lesson observations and the school's own evaluations of teaching, shows securely improving progress. Standards are rising quickly in some subjects, such as mathematics, because they have focussed upon improving the quality of teaching in the department and tracking student progress. Decisive action has successfully tackled past variations in progress made by students with differing levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities. All are now making at least satisfactory progress.

In observed lessons, most students made good progress with positive attitudes to learning. Students make better progress in lessons where teachers equip them with the confidence and skills to work independently and enable them to assess and evaluate their own work. For example, in a Year 7 science lesson about currents, all students, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, were highly engaged and made rapid progress through the teacher's highly effective questioning and their ability to assess each other's work. However, where teaching is less engaging, students make only satisfactory progress. This is often where the pace is slower and there is less challenge. A small minority of lessons involved students copying information from the interactive white board with little opportunity for discussion or for an enquiry-based approach to learning.

Students are polite and welcoming to visitors and happy to talk about their work. Some students reported that where teaching is weak there is some poor behaviour. However, they generally report that they feel that behaviour is good in and around the school and where poor behaviour occurs it is dealt with effectively. There were no permanent exclusions last year; this is due to the well-tailored curriculum and strong partnerships with vocational providers. Good behaviour was evident around the school throughout the inspection and the very large majority of behaviour seen in lessons was good or better.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They run a 'fair trade' shop in school and regularly visit places of worship for different faiths. Good opportunities exist for students to learn about economic well-being through the extended curriculum.

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However, because of consistently low attainment in the basic skills, their readiness for the world of work remains only satisfactory.

Attendance is average and showing improvement due to the extensive team of staff involved in working with individual students and their families. Persistent absentees are reducing rapidly due to the targeted actions of the school. The overwhelming majority of students leave school and progress onto further education, training or employment.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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 overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, although there were many examples of good and some outstanding teaching observed, for example, within the school's specialism. Teachers generally have good relationships with students and most students report that they know what is expected of them in lessons. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations, trust the students to work well together to complete tasks and set clear deadlines for what needs to be achieved. This enables the students to develop independence and to take responsibility for assessing their own progress. In these lessons, teaching assistants are well managed to support students with additional learning needs. There were some good examples of marking, particularly in assessment books; however, this is yet to be embedded across the school. Where lessons are weaker, teachers give little responsibility to students and often these lessons are almost entirely led by the teacher. Dialogue between staff and students in these lessons is minimal.

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The curriculum is well organised with a very wide range of academic and vocational GCSE courses that are appropriately adjusted to meet the needs and interests of different groups and individual students. It contributes well to students' personal development and for groups whose achievement is weaker, it allows them to go on to further education, employment or training. Strong partnerships with other providers have successfully extended the number of vocational programmes on offer. Personalised programmes, including work placements, are organised for individual students who benefit enormously from these opportunities. Students benefit from a vast choice of extra-curricular opportunities including many educational visits. For example, during this inspection, a small group of BTEC students was at the local airport as part of their travel and tourism course.

Partnership work is used well to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. One parent comments 'my son is dyslexic and within weeks of him starting at Highfield he had one-to-one teaching which has helped him so much. They've also recognised that he is very talented and are already preparing him for his GCSEs. Students speak very positively about a week long residential for Year 8 which helped build their confidence and make lasting friendships. Students say they are given good guidance to secure their next steps in education, training or work and the school provides a good range of work placements to support students in making career choices.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The school leadership recognises that, although the school has been successful in improving some aspects of its work, such as teaching and the specialist subjects, it has been slow in improving the general standards reached by students in Year 11. Currently, the best practice in the school is not shared widely enough. The school continues to face staffing difficulties and a new school is being built on the current site, both of which have absorbed much of the time of senior leaders and managers and slowed progress overall since the last inspection.

The headteacher and the senior leadership team are committed to raising standards and driving school improvement. The overwhelming majority of staff say they feel proud to be a part of the school. Plans for improvement are of good quality but senior and middle leaders do not always monitor agreed actions carefully enough. For example, opportunities are missed to strategically monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions to improve attendance. The monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning by middle leaders lacks

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rigour in some departments and actions to overcome weaker teaching are not swift enough.

Governance is satisfactory. The governing body is supportive but is not fully involved in school improvement planning and school self-evaluation. Therefore, whilst there are many examples of it challenging the school and holding it to account, the monitoring by the governing body of the school's progress lacks rigour.

The school is successfully closing gaps in attainment between different groups, for example, for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals. They are tracking the progress of different groups and have an individual breakdown of interventions they used with students who underachieved last year. Again, this is less effective than it might be since leaders at all levels are not fully involved in the monitoring and tracking of groups at risk of underachieving. A small minority of parents and carers commented that their concerns about school had not been handled effectively. However, responses from the very large majority of parents and carers and students indicate that complaints are dealt with effectively.

Students have a well-developed understanding of the wider world which is greatly enhanced by the many educational visits and activities arranged such as the National Youth Parliament and outward bound courses with other schools. Safeguarding is good and meets all statutory requirements.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires say that they are happy with their children's experience at the school. They are pleased with the quality of teaching and care that their children receive and feel that the school is well led. One

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parent commented, 'the staff are conscientious and hard working, they're very approachable and the school is managed well.' Inspection findings uphold their general views. A very small minority feel that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour and bullying. Inspectors took particular note of this view in observing behaviour in lessons, on corridors and in the grounds. They spoke to groups of students, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. They found behaviour to be good and its management to be effective. Students reported that there were many different adults they could turn to if they experienced bullying and that incidents were dealt with swiftly. A small minority of parents and carers questioned said that they did not feel that the school helps them to support their child's learning. Inspectors explored this issue with the senior leaders at the school. In response to this, the school is looking into how it can further improve engagement through the parental portal where parents and carers can check their children's progress and support them more effectively in their learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Highfield Humanities College 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 110 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1099 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	24	79	72	1	1	4	4
The school keeps my child safe	39	35	66	60	4	4	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	46	42	59	54	5	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	39	58	53	6	5	3	3
The teaching is good at this school	29	26	68	62	8	7	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	23	68	62	13	12	4	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	22	69	63	12	11	3	3
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)	34	31	68	62	4	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	36	33	62	56	8	7	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	23	69	63	10	9	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	20	65	59	11	10	4	4
The school is led and managed effectively	31	28	71	65	5	5	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	41	59	54	4	4	2	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	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).

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">■ 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.



01 April 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Highfield Humanities College, Blackpool, FY4 3JZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Many of you gave up your time to speak to us and to complete questionnaires. We found what you said interesting and thought provoking; your comments helped us arrive at our judgments. We were particularly impressed with the friendly and caring atmosphere in the school and your good behaviour. We recognised that you play a very important part in making Highfield Humanities College a friendly and safe place to learn.

To summarise, we found that:

- despite low attainment, all groups of students are now making satisfactory progress
- teaching is good in some subjects but weaker in others
- the good care system supports all of you and is particularly effective in helping those of you who experience difficulties from time to time
- you are very caring, make a positive contribution to your school and local community and like to help other people by raising money.

We have asked the school to improve the quality of teaching and learning by regularly sharing the practice that goes on in the best lessons with other teachers and giving you more opportunities to work independently in lessons. We have also asked the school to raise attainment at Key Stage 4, particularly in the core subjects, by increasing the level of pace and challenge in all lessons. Finally, we have identified some ways for school leaders to evaluate the impact of their actions more closely.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Kenyon

Her Majesty's Inspector

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