

Holbrook High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137208
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	387204
Inspection dates	29 February–1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Ian Seath HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	522
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Gould
Headteacher	Debra Pritchard
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector

John Mason

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Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. A total of 30 lessons and 29 teachers were observed across all years and key stages. In addition, a further 14 classes were visited for short periods to evaluate specific inspection themes. Meetings were held with students, staff, leaders and managers and the Chair of the Governing Body. The number of responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) was very low. Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at the records of meetings, documents relating to action planning and self-evaluation, governors' minutes and other general management documents. Records of lesson observations were scrutinised. Inspectors analysed responses to inspection questionnaires from 254 parents and carers, in addition to a significant number from students and staff.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than averagesized secondary school. It converted to academy status in August 2011. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low, as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is lower than average. The proportion of students who join the school at times other than the usual time of year is a little higher than average.

The school meets the current national floor standard for attainment but not for expected progress in English. Progress in mathematics meets the current floor standard.

The school has specialist status in languages and humanities.

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	4
Achievement of pupils	4
Quality of teaching	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	4
Leadership and management	4

Key findings

- In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.
- The school is not satisfactory because students' progress has declined since the previous inspection and is now well below the national average. The progress of most groups is below the national average, including the small number who are disabled or have special educational needs or disabilities. Performance at GCSE has declined markedly since the previous inspection.
- Inspectors observed some good or better teaching, notably in English and in history. However there are too many inadequate lessons. Overall, students make inadequate progress. Students are slow to develop skills of independent learning because in too many lessons they are not sufficiently challenged. In these lessons behaviour deteriorates and learning suffers. Teaching has insufficient impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. A relatively large proportion of parents and carers and students expressed justifiable concerns about disruptive behaviour in class.
- Leaders and managers have failed to improve the progress made by students or to eradicate inadequate teaching. The governing body has not challenged poor performance adequately. Target setting and monitoring of staff performance are weak and have not had a sufficiently beneficial impact on the quality of provision. There are many inconsistencies in the school's work and systems to monitor provision are weak. The curriculum is satisfactory because enrichment and extra-curricular activities increase students' enjoyment of their school and are a factor in improving attendance.
- Since September 2011 school leaders have made a number of staff

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appointments, notably in the areas of English, mathematics, and the management of teaching and learning. The Chair of the Governing Body is also new in post. Although only a short time has elapsed, early indications are that improvements are beginning to emerge in these areas. It is too early to be sure that these improvements will be sustained, however.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By September 2013, increase the pace of students' learning and progress to raise attainment to at least the national average by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good or better teaching
 - ensuring that assessment is accurate and lessons well planned so that all teaching challenges all students
 - consistently developing students' skills in literacy and numeracy in other subjects as well as mathematics and English.

- With the involvement of parents, carers and students, by September 2012, tackle issues that a significant number of them are concerned about by:
 - ensuring that all teachers implement behaviour policies consistently so that disruptive behaviour in class is eliminated
 - devising and implementing a structured homework policy for all subjects that includes how it is marked and clear guidance to ensure that homework consolidates classroom learning.

- By September 2012 improve leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - improving systems for observing lessons so that students' learning and progress are accurately monitored
 - systematically identifying and disseminating the very best practice in teaching and learning, for example that found in English and history
 - holding school leaders fully to account for the progress made by students
 - ensuring that all targets for performance management are challenging, clearly understood by those who are responsible and accountable for them, and set within a precise timeframe
 - ensuring that the governing body monitors all improvements rigorously, challenging where appropriate.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The proportion of students who gained five or more good GCSEs in all subjects in 2011 was well below the national average, although close to the national average

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when mathematics and English are included. Students enter the school with prior attainment that is higher than average and therefore these outcomes represent progress that is below expectations with a pronounced declining trend since the previous inspection. Pass rates at GCSE are very variable between subjects. GCSE results in languages, one of the school's specialist areas, were well below the national average in 2011.

This underachievement is seen in most groups. The progress of boys is well below that of girls, though their attainment is similar and the attainment gap between the two has narrowed. The small numbers of disabled students and those who have special educational needs make less progress than their peers overall, but their progress in English and mathematics is comparable because the support that they receive is well targeted to their needs in these subjects.

In lessons, students' progress is too variable. In the better lessons they are challenged well and are able to practise skills that lead to good learning and progress. However, in those lessons that lack challenge or are inadequate, learning declines markedly as students become restless. In a few lessons students are taught at a level that is much lower than that which they have already attained or are capable of. When this happens, it results in inadequate progress. A larger proportion of parents and carers than usual, though still a minority, feel that their child does not make enough progress. This view is supported by published data, observations of progress in lessons and the scrutiny of students' work during this inspection.

Since September 2011 the school's assessment data indicate progress and attainment are beginning to improve in mathematics and English. The data predict that GCSE outcomes will be around the national average in these subjects. However, it is too soon to be sure that these improvements can reverse the downward trend or that they can be sustained.

Quality of teaching

While the school provides some good or better teaching, students experience a significant number of lessons that are inadequate and that fail to challenge them. In addition, many students' learning skills are not well developed and many have not been encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. The use of assessment to judge learning and progress has been introduced very recently. Students know the levels they are working at and their target levels, but few are clear about how to achieve them or what skills they need to develop. Scrutiny of written work and observations in lessons indicate that teachers sometimes overestimate the students' attainment, especially that of the most able.

In too many lessons assessment data are not used effectively. Students of differing abilities receive the same teaching, resulting in different rates of progress. This is particularly significant in mixed-ability classes. In the least successful lessons students are taught at too low a level so that they become bored and behaviour deteriorates. This, together with the inconsistent application of behaviour policies, is

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responsible for the relatively high proportion of parents and carers and students who feel that learning is too often disrupted in class. For this reason, together with the weak development of learning skills, the impact of teaching on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inadequate.

Students and parents and carers expressed significant concerns about homework and marking. They correctly noted that homework is irregular, infrequent for many subjects, often insufficiently challenging, and that too often the marking is not helpful or detailed enough. Some parents and carers noted that homework is not always used effectively to consolidate learning in lessons. Notably, many comments were positive about practice in English. Inspection findings supported these views.

Some teachers use assessment information well to structure learning in lessons. In these examples the teaching is well suited to different levels and aptitudes so that all students learn well and those at the lowest attainment levels learn most. These teachers' lessons are well planned and make good use of teaching assistants. The teachers' expectations are high and collaborative learning is used effectively. Such an approach is seen consistently in English lessons, for example, and in the support for those who find learning most difficult.

Students' reading skills are in line with expectations. However, some students report that access to the library is sometimes difficult because staffing has been reduced. School leaders have recognised the importance of using the skills of literacy and numeracy in subjects other than English and mathematics but the implementation of this policy is inconsistent. Opportunities are often missed to improve students' literacy skills, for example by correcting spelling and grammar or challenging students to spell newly introduced or technical vocabulary.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Most students and parents and carers correctly state that students feel safe at the school. However, a considerably larger than expected proportion from both groups expressed concerns around behaviour, mainly the disruption of learning in class. Inspectors observed disruptions to learning, albeit in a minority of classes. This varies from students simply ceasing to work because they were bored, to more serious disruption in which learning is difficult. In this situation good use is made of the school's 'pit stop' room in which students are able to take time out yet still continue with their work. Behaviour is best where teaching is good, and where students are interested and challenged. Comments from parents and carers and students rightly noted the inconsistency with which teachers apply behaviour policies. A significant number of staff also commented on inconsistent management of behaviour. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are monitored, but the results are not used effectively to improve it. The number of permanent exclusions is increasing.

The school's records show that bullying does occur sometimes, and this was confirmed by parents and carers and students. Most comments indicate that incidents are resolved and dealt with promptly. Attendance is close to the national

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average and persistent absence has improved. However, punctuality is sometimes poor, especially between lessons. Around the school, students move sensibly between lessons. They are generally polite, courteous and helpful.

Leadership and management

The school's performance has declined unremittingly since the previous inspection. Although the headteacher and other leaders and managers have identified many of the issues and correctly understand what needs to be done, processes to make these changes have been weak. Some aspects are improving, for example English and history, but these improvements are very recent and not yet embedded. New staffing appointments are a positive development, especially in the key areas of teaching and learning.

Evaluations of performance at all levels are overgenerous. As a result, many are insufficiently self-critical. Improvement plans generally recognise the issues but only occasionally provide precise targets for improvement. Monitoring of progress towards targets is weak at all levels. Within most departments, the extent to which the quality of provision is maintained is inconsistent, a point made by numerous parents and carers. They commented on the lack of consistency with regard to homework, the quality of teaching, control of behaviour and other important aspects of the students' experience. Performance management is ineffective because targets are too imprecise and not well monitored. Teachers are not held sufficiently to account for the performance of their students. Leaders and managers have not demonstrated the capacity to bring about significant and sustained improvement.

Members of the governing body bring many skills to the school and have supported it well through the transition to academy status. However, they have not effectively challenged declining performance, or monitored improvement in a systematic way, for example in teaching, learning and progress. The Chair of the Governing Body recognises this. The governing body has ensured that the school meets safeguarding requirements. However the monitoring of equalities, particularly outcomes for different groups of students, has been inadequate. For example, the monitoring of an action plan to improve the progress of those known to be eligible for free school meals is insufficient.

The development of teaching and learning has been insufficient to eradicate inadequate teaching or overcome underachievement. Judgements of lesson observations are overgenerous and monitoring pays too much attention to the activities of teachers rather than focusing on the learning of students. Associated with this, lesson planning is weak, often containing a list of activities rather than clear learning objectives for all students. Opportunities for teachers' professional development do now occur, with some sharing of best practice. However, this is not yet well established or systematic across subject areas. For example the features of outstanding teaching seen in history have not been disseminated across other subjects.

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The school's curriculum is satisfactory because of strengths in the enrichment opportunities students receive, which are greatly appreciated both by them and by their parents and carers. Students welcome the extensive extra-curricular and sports activities, especially the well-equipped sports centre adjoining the school. In addition, those who find learning most difficult benefit from effective provision. The school offers a wide range of GCSE subjects as well as a small vocational provision taught off site. Students and parents and carers commented on their enjoyment of music and associated facilities.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

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

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

2 March 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Holbrook High School, Ipswich, IP9 2QX

As you will know, I visited your school recently with two colleagues. We visited most of your classes, talked with many of you, and looked at much of your work. Thank you for welcoming us.

You and your parents and carers told us many things. Most of you are happy at the school and you feel safe. Many parents and carers would recommend the school, however a significant number wrote to us that they are concerned about some aspects. These concerns were about disruptive behaviour that hinders learning, homework and marking, and the quality of some teaching. We think these concerns are well founded and inspection evidence indicates that these aspects of the school are too inconsistent. This has led to a fall in achievement over the last few years. We have therefore placed the school into special measures. This means that inspectors will visit regularly to check the progress being made by the school.

The headteacher and her colleagues recognise many of the improvements that need to be made, and have made a start in bringing them about. We have asked that the school involves parents and carers and students in this process. This is important, for example, if the school is to improve behaviour in classes.

We have also asked that the school's leaders work on improving the consistency of teaching. This will mean making sure that all of you are challenged to achieve your best in class. It will include spreading the strong teaching practice that you told us about and that we saw for ourselves, for example in history and English.

In addition, we have asked that the issues of inconsistency around homework and marking are tackled. Homework will become more regular and will help you to consolidate what you have learned in class. Finally, we have asked that governors monitor improvements more effectively and we have identified timescales that will help with this.

Once again, thank you.

Yours sincerely

Ian Seath
Her Majesty's Inspector

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