

Helenswood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114600
Local Authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	378897
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Taylor-Bennett HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1221
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barbara Browning
Headteacher	Lucy Monk
Date of previous school inspection	25 March 2009
School address	The Ridge St Leonards-on-Sea East Sussex TN37 7PS
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 50 lessons and the work of 49 teachers. In addition, meetings were held with groups of students, representatives of the governing body, and staff. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's development plans, its self-review, analyses of the attainment and progress of its students, records of lesson observations, and policies. Inspectors took account of the responses on the 166 questionnaires received from parents and carers and other questionnaire responses 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.

- Trends in outcomes for students.
- The progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly those whose needs are designated at school action plus.
- The impact of measures taken to improve attendance.
- How well the school identifies and supports students who may underachieve in examinations at the end of Year 11.

Information about the school

Helenswood School is larger than average, and it is a specialist school for the performing arts. The main school is situated on two sites, about one mile apart, and students in the sixth form attend Parkwood Sixth Form, which is managed jointly with a local boys' school. The great majority of its students are White British. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly lower than average; their needs are largely associated with specific literacy issues and behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The school has National Healthy Schools Status and holds the Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark Gold and Investor in Careers awards. It is part of a group providing school-centred initial teaching training.

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

- Helenswood School is providing a satisfactory quality of education for its students. The headteacher and her senior team have a clear vision for how outcomes for all students will improve, and they communicate this vigorously and successfully.
- There are clear expectations, and good monitoring and evaluation systems in place. Development planning is thorough, and it concentrates on appropriate priorities. Many systems and structures have only been in place for just over a year and have not yet had an impact on achievement, which has been steady for several years, but they give the school a secure capacity to improve.
- The climate for learning and behaviour in the main school has improved since the previous inspection and it is now good. Although many girls lack confidence in their abilities, and some of the teaching does not offer sufficient opportunities for them to play a significant part in lessons, they show a readiness and willingness to learn. Other outcomes also have a positive trend, including attendance which is now in line with national averages.
- Students enter the school with attainment that is slightly below the national average and attain broadly in line with expectations by Year 11. Their achievement is satisfactory. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress; the relatively slower progress made by some groups in recent years has been addressed because they are now supported better.
- The progress made by girls over their two years in the sixth form is satisfactory and has improved over recent years. The progress students make in some AS courses in Year 12 is less secure. Other outcomes for sixth form students are good and there are satisfactory provision and leadership in the sixth form.
- The school has good systems to care and support students throughout the school. Staff know and value individuals, and respond to their needs speedily and effectively. The quality of advice and guidance about academic progress is a strength throughout the school.
- Senior leaders set ambitious targets which support good levels of aspiration and ambition. In some lessons however, this does not translate into teaching that challenges students and fosters good progress. Although there is good and outstanding practice in some classrooms, some teaching is uninspiring. When this is the case students listen attentively, but do not take an active role in their learning. This is usually because the quality of learning is not the focus of teaching strategies. Work is sometimes not well matched to need because students' understanding is not gauged often and accurately enough. Although

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- there is some good practice in marking, there is little consistency in approach and often no requirement for any specific response from the student.
- The curriculum is good because it is well matched to students' needs and generates some good enrichment activities, which are enjoyed. The performing arts specialism is vibrant and provides a very wide range of exciting opportunities for students to develop a broad range of skills and take part in many impressive arts events. This also gives them a vehicle through which they contribute strongly to their local community.
 - Many home-school links are well developed and effective. Parents and carers value the work of the school and show appropriately high levels of trust in its senior leaders. Some, however, feel that they would like to know more about how to support their daughter's education, and to contribute to the school's development. The girls themselves also have insights to offer the staff to help them to improve provision. Although there are good opportunities in place for them to take on responsibilities, they have few chances to work with staff on ways to improve the quality of their learning.
 - Middle leaders are becoming a stronger team and they are acquiring many of the skills necessary to direct developments. A few senior staff currently make all major judgements about effectiveness and steer the responses from middle leadership.

About 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.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that at least 75% is good or better by July 2012 by:
 - ensuring that all strategies to improve teaching are guided by a scrutiny of the quality of the learning
 - using a range of assessment techniques to monitor students' understanding of the work during a lesson and adapting the teaching and the use of resources accordingly
 - delegating substantially more responsibility to middle leaders for monitoring and evaluating.
- Ensure that the good levels of expectation communicated in whole school targets result in improvements in the attainment of all groups of students by:
 - offering different levels and types of challenge to groups of students in all lessons which are appropriate to their needs
 - improving the quality and the consistency of marking so that individual students are given clear and specific guidance about how they may make better progress.
- Enable all students to play an active part in their learning by:
 - building in more opportunities for them to contribute to lessons more actively

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- encouraging them to question their own understanding, and that of their peers, more rigorously
- developing ways by which their views, and those of their parents and carers, can contribute to plans to improve outcomes for students.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students make satisfactory progress and their attainment at the end of Year 11 is in line with national averages. Students’ progress in mathematics has been very good for several years but was no more than satisfactory in 2011. The quality of students’ learning is good or better in some lessons, but it is often only satisfactory because of a lack of challenge and pace. The achievement of different groups is closely monitored at whole-school level and there are no significant differences. In recent years, the achievement of some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has been disappointing, but a greater awareness of their needs and more closely coordinated support are now bringing their progress in line with that of their peers.

Students behave thoughtfully and with respect for each other around both of the school sites, and they are punctual to lessons. The small amount of poor behaviour is associated with teaching that does not inspire or motivate; generally the girls are interested in learning. Students say they feel very safe in school and that there are always adults and fellow students to help or support them. They willingly take on leadership responsibilities and there is an active school council, but opportunities to contribute to developing the curriculum and the quality of their learning are restricted to subjects in the performing arts. Students support events in the local community very willingly and many benefit from moving outside of their comfort zone in such activities, often surprising themselves about what they can achieve. The many trips and visits contribute significantly to students’ cultural development because of their links with subjects’ schemes of work. Many students take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, including a range of sports. They make good choices about health-related issues and a good understanding is shown of the factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle.

Students appreciate the guidance they receive about their next steps, including course choices and further education and employment options. They develop good decision-making skills. Their capacity to use numeracy and literacy skills in novel contexts is adequately developed, and many use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently. Students are developing a wide range of skills that will enable them to secure their future economic well-being.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	3

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Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	
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	2
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

How effective is the provision?

The best teaching in the school capitalises on students' capacity to be good learners and to take responsibility for making improvements to their own work. In these lessons, students are busy and purposeful, they behave well and they enjoy the process of learning. In some classrooms, however, teachers fail to make the most of this natural enthusiasm and devote too much time to explaining and informing, rather than encouraging inquisitiveness and requiring students to think ideas through for themselves. In such cases, the quality of students' learning is not prioritised and tasks and resources are not matched to the needs of individual groups according to their needs.

The curriculum is well suited to the needs of students. There is a good range of different types of courses on offer. For example, the new BTEC science course has been implemented well, and the teaching has adapted to obtain the potential advantages of the different approaches to learning and assessment involved. Some students who would struggle with the demands of GCSE courses have the opportunity to undertake project work with The Prince's Trust as a part of their Level 1 courses. The school has responded to the new English Baccalaureate by building in an appropriate course choice structure at Key Stage 4. Everyone has the opportunity to obtain a qualification in ICT. Strategies to develop literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects are less well embedded and opportunities are missed to reinforce the application of learning in English and mathematics across all subjects.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good because there are good support systems in place for all students, and these are complemented by effective links with outside agencies. Students value the ways in which staff look after their needs. Some tutor time involves the coordinated delivery of important provision, for example

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

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careers information, advice and guidance, but this time is not always used as effectively as it may be. The Lodge provides good care and support for the needs of some potentially vulnerable students, and has very well developed links with specialist agencies.

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 headteacher and her senior team have clear ambitions for the future of the school. Middle leaders are excited about now having opportunities to drive change and improvement as a team, and they attribute this to the quality of overall leadership and line management systems. These changes have taken time to bring about and they are generating new thinking in areas of the school's work that have not seen improvement for some time. Senior leaders evaluate the quality of teaching accurately and they are addressing the small amount of inadequate practice remaining. They understand that the key to transforming the nature of teaching in the school lies in improving the quality of the continual assessment of students' learning in lessons. Opportunities for professional development are well planned and they balance individual and collective needs well. The team of Advanced Skills Teachers plays an effective role in the delivery of training.

Governors have recently reorganised the ways in which they offer support to the senior staff. They are now all better informed about the school's achievements, and offer constructive challenge. Their judgements of the quality of some aspects of the school's work have been inflated, but they are now able to deal with evidence effectively to inform their strategies. They contribute effectively to the school's systems to ensure the safety and well-being of all of its students and carry out this, and other statutory responsibilities, satisfactorily.

The school has good links with a range of partners. For example, its work in the Creative Partnerships initiative has supported changes in teaching styles. Liaison with the partner school in the joint sixth form is strong. Links with specialist agencies to support the needs of vulnerable students are well developed and effective.

The school has an appropriate emphasis on ensuring equality of opportunity and eliminating discrimination. Outcomes for some groups of students are not improving sufficiently quickly, but any differences in achievement across groups are monitored closely and managed carefully.

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The school has good links with its local community, including with specific groups such as the local mosque, which serve to support good community cohesion. The specialist performing arts subjects play a significant role in community links, and there are many music, drama and dance events that enrich the cultural life of residents in the area significantly.

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	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students enjoy the joint provision offered by Parkwood Sixth Form. They benefit from the support of a dedicated team whose members offer well-targeted advice and guidance which encourages ambition and aspiration, including good support for applications to higher education. The majority of students follow advanced level courses and there is a good range of subjects on offer. The progress students have made by the time they complete their A2 programmes is satisfactory, as a result of teaching that is satisfactory. Progress in Year 12 has been weaker over recent years, sometimes as a consequence of students having been advised inappropriately on course choices; the advice and guidance offered to prospective sixth formers is now better. There are some applied GCE subjects offered and students make good progress in these courses. Students have a wide range of ways to be involved in their community and many give their time generously. Some have been involved in an international project, building a school in Uganda.

The satisfactory leadership and management of the sixth form are generating improvements in several areas of its work. Development planning is rigorous and the monitoring of students’ progress has become much better coordinated over the last

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year, to the point where interventions to support achievement can be rapid and effective. However, attendance monitoring systems do not give the opportunity for tutors to respond quickly and decisively and, as a consequence, student absence sometimes affects progress and motivation.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers returning questionnaires was in line with the average across secondary schools. A very high proportion expressed satisfaction with their daughter’s experiences at the school and the great majority of parents and carers feel that their children are safe and happy there, and well prepared for their future education and employment. There is a high regard for the leadership of the school. Some concerns were expressed, matching those of inspectors, that some teachers do not offer sufficient challenge to students to make good or better progress. A higher number of parents than usual felt that they did not have enough ways to be involved in supporting their child’s education and progress, and some wanted more opportunities to be involved in the work of the school, and to have their views heard. The school currently provides opportunities for parents to be involved and senior leaders expressed some frustration at the lack of attendance at some events. However, they recognise that different strategies may well result in more parents becoming more closely involved in their work.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Helenswood 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 166 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,221 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	46	28	105	63	13	8	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	58	35	104	63	4	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	37	22	104	63	13	8	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	30	99	60	8	5	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	41	25	105	63	13	8	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	27	16	99	60	29	17	3	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	24	14	114	69	22	13	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)	39	23	101	61	14	8	2	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	42	25	98	59	17	10	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	22	95	57	20	12	5	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	24	14	109	66	17	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	45	27	103	62	13	8	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	57	34	97	58	10	6	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



14 October 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Helenswood School, St Leonards-on-Sea TN37 7PS

Thank you for the welcome you extended to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. You can read our full report on the Ofsted website but I have provided a brief summary of our findings here for you.

We found that your school provides you with a satisfactory education. Some aspects of its work are good. The curriculum offers good opportunities for you to enjoy learning, especially the exciting events that take place because of the school's performing arts specialism. The quality of the care and guidance staff provide for you is also good, including the support offered for those of you who have extra needs. You said that you feel very safe in school, and many of you obviously make important contributions to your school, and to the local community.

Your headteacher and her senior team are leading your school very well. I have agreed certain areas for improvement with them.

- For all teachers to gauge your understanding in lessons more often.
- To expect more of you in lessons by setting work that challenges each one of you and by marking your work in ways that help you to see clearly how to improve.
- To ensure that you play a more active part in your learning.
- To enlist your support in developing the quality of learning in the whole school, and involve your parents and carers more fully in its development.

We felt in our conversations with many of you that you have a real part to play in making your school even better. You can do this by reading the full report, reflecting on your individual and collective responses, and by continuing to work hard and trusting in the good leadership shown by your headteacher.

I wish all of you every happiness and success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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