

Hednesford Valley High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124508
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	380906
Inspection dates	29 February–1 March 2012
Lead inspector	Sue Morris-King HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	126
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol Felton
Headteacher	Anita Rattan
Date of previous school inspection	19 November 2008
School address	Stanley Road Hednesford WS12 4JS
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

Sue Morris-King

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Heald

Additional inspector

Inspectors observed 11 lessons taught by 10 different members of staff, including teachers and higher level teaching assistants. Five of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors also observed short parts of 12 other lessons. Altogether, around eight hours of teaching were observed. Meetings were held with senior staff and governors. Inspectors met with two groups of students. One group took part in a formal meeting with an inspector and brought their work to show him and to discuss. Another group showed an inspector around the school to show various aspects of school life. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. During the two days of the inspection, as well as observing lessons, inspectors spent time in the playground with students, talked with them at lunchtimes, and looked at a range of documentation including the school's tracking of students' progress, examples of students' work, and records of students' behaviour. They considered the responses to 52 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

Information about the school

Hednesford Valley High is a special school catering for secondary-aged students with a wide range of needs. All the students have a statement of special educational needs, most commonly for moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, or autistic spectrum disorders. A small number of students have hearing impairments, profound multiple learning difficulties or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Many of the students have additional speech, language and communication needs. A high proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Around 10% of students are looked after children. Students are predominantly White British.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school with a good sixth form. Good teaching enables students to progress academically and personally. Students thoroughly enjoy coming to school. They are enthusiastic about their learning. The school is not yet outstanding because some of the very strong work that is going on, for example extending the curriculum and the improved use of data, is quite new.
- Senior leaders give teachers good support and challenge them to continually improve their teaching. Teachers respond to this professionally. As a result, the outcomes for students have improved since the last inspection.
- By the time they leave at the end of Year 11 or at the end of the sixth form, the vast majority of students have made good progress with their literacy, numeracy and communication skills and have qualifications that demonstrate this. Students have targets for each subject but these are not as challenging in some subjects as in others. The school does not have a clear way of showing how much personal progress the students make.
- Communication is one of the school’s strengths. Staff use a range of different ways of communication, such as signing, symbols, and electronic communication aids, to help students to learn. Staff have high expectations of what students can achieve, including in the sixth form. They also have a warm and welcoming manner, which reassures students and helps them to feel confident to try new activities and to learn new skills. These aspects all contribute to students’ good achievement.
- Students of all ages feel safe and have good attitudes to learning. Their behaviour in lessons is very positive. Some students find it difficult to behave quite as well at break and lunchtimes. To help them, the school has started to think about how to give students more responsibilities at these social times.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Refine subject-specific target setting so that targets in all subjects are equally challenging for students.

- Formalise the way in which students' personal and social progress is captured both in the short and longer term so that teachers and leaders can assess personal progress over time alongside academic progress and be able to celebrate success more easily.
- Extend the opportunities that students have to take responsibility for supporting and including each other during social times.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' good achievement reflects the good quality of teaching they receive, and their positive attitudes to learning. Nearly all parents and carers are pleased with the progress that their children are making. All groups of students, including those who are looked after children, progress equally well during their time at the school. Occasionally, a very small minority of students experience personal issues that mean that they fall behind for a short time or do not complete their examination courses.

Many students make good progress with their reading and writing skills during their time at the school. In the lessons observed during the inspection, including those in the sixth form, students worked hard to complete written tasks, to use subject-specific vocabulary, and to read texts. Their work over time shows that this is typical. The school's data show that students with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties make good progress with their communication skills and their understanding of key concepts. In lessons, these students showed that they had understood the key concepts and had made progress during the lesson. Students also make progress in a range of physical, practical and social skills, including organising sports sessions, travelling independently on the bus, using computers, cooking, and forming positive personal relationships.

Previously, the accreditation that the school has made available to students has not always allowed the more able students to achieve at an appropriately high level. This has now improved. Almost all Year 11 students who left in 2011, from all groups, made good progress during their time at the school. In 2011, five students took and passed GCSE science. The grades they attained in this subject represented excellent progress from their starting points. Students with moderate learning difficulties also gained up to 14 Entry Level qualifications, including in English, mathematics and science, which demonstrated good progress from their starting points. More GCSE and equivalent courses are available for current students, including those in the sixth form, which is helping them to achieve well. Students' destinations from the end of Year 11 and the end of the sixth form onwards are also an indication of the progress they make at school. Almost all the students who left school in 2011 are in education or training, and occasionally employment. Reports from colleges and from families indicate that these young people are attending well, enjoying their further learning, and are continuing to make progress.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was good overall. Small amounts of satisfactory and one example of outstanding teaching were observed. This picture corresponds with the school's own evidence about teaching and with parents' and carers' views – the vast majority of parents believe that their children are well taught.

Lessons are typically well planned, interesting and engaging, and are almost always suited to students' needs. While staff are caring and understanding they do not accept excuses and will coax, encourage or insist that students put their best efforts into their work, as appropriate. All of the lessons observed had a good pace that was appropriate to students' needs. Importantly, when teachers ask questions they usually pause to give students time to think and reflect. This allows them to express what they are thinking. Lessons give students a variety of opportunities to practise their literacy skills, particularly their reading and subject-specific vocabulary.

Social and moral aspects are taught well. Staff remind students how to interact with each other and often explore moral themes such as bullying. Lessons give students the opportunity to work in pairs and groups and sometimes to take leadership. In one lesson, for example, Year 11 students who are studying for a Sports Leaders Award organised and led a sports activity for their peers, with considerable confidence and skill. Importantly, the teacher let them take the lead and did not intervene. Cultural and spiritual development is promoted well, for example when making a stroganoff in food technology, the teacher explained to students the origins of the dish. In an English lesson, a crime mystery intrigued students.

Staff make lessons relevant to real life. For example, in a mathematics lesson, the teacher used a variety of images on the interactive whiteboard to teach students concepts of relative size, such as a picture of a canal and a river to illustrate 'narrower' and 'wider'. The teamwork between teaching assistants and teachers, and the active role played by teaching assistants, are significant strengths.

Senior leaders have previously identified that sometimes teachers dominate lessons, spending too much time talking at the expense of students responding. This has improved, but sometimes still occurs. Lessons are occasionally too difficult for students, or too crowded with activities. There is no clear rationale for setting annual subject-specific targets for students. This leads to too much variation from one subject to another.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Staff and students agree that students' behaviour is good. The vast majority of parents also agree, although a small number think that there is sometimes some disruption to learning. Students' positive attitudes to school are evident in their high and much improved attendance levels. Very few students are persistently absent and if they are, the school deals with this supportively, for example by making creative adaptations to an individual's curriculum. Students arrive punctually to school and to lessons, ready to learn.

Students' attitudes to learning are good, and sometimes excellent. Students generally

arrive at lessons in a positive frame of mind. They rise to the challenges that are put to them, for example in a mathematics lesson, one student requested that the teacher ask him 'a harder question'. Sometimes, when they know what they are going to learn about, they are highly enthusiastic before the lesson has even begun. For example, some Year 8 students who were studying a topic about a crime investigation over several lessons arrived at their lesson during the inspection already offering their thoughts and solutions. Where students find a particular type of work, such as reading, difficult they can be more reluctant to engage, but are still largely co-operative. Students work well with each other in lessons and are understanding of each other's individual needs, for example when a student needs to work in shorter bursts, or to work in a quiet corner while still taking part.

During break and lunchtimes, and during lesson changeover times, students' behaviour is largely good. At these times, however, some students find it more difficult to manage their interactions with others. Both the school's records and students' views indicate that bullying incidents are rare. However the school is aware that low-level interactions that can upset and annoy students happen more frequently, and that some students are not always included in games by others. The school is working increasingly imaginatively on this aspect. For example, some students are being taught how to be 'play buddies' for some students with more complex needs. A girls' group is helping some girls to manage their friendships better.

The school works supportively and effectively with students with more challenging behaviours. Its well organised data about incidents indicate that these students make good progress in improving their behaviour over time. The school does not exclude students; instead it manages students' behaviour within the school and constantly adapts to students' different needs. A range of useful strategies helps students to know what to expect during the day, which in turn helps them to remain calm and to be independent. For example, visual timetables, which tutors go through carefully with students at the start of each morning and afternoon, enable students to change classrooms independently and to be ready for their next subject. The use of signing, symbols and electronic aids allows students who do not speak, and those who are deaf, to communicate their needs clearly. The school places a good emphasis on teaching students how to stay safe. E-safety has a high profile and students understand how to use computers safely.

Leadership and management

Since the previous inspection, the headteacher and senior leaders have made a number of improvements to the school. In particular, they have improved the use of data, the way in which students' progress is tracked, the extent to which the curriculum and support meet individual student's needs, and the accreditation on offer for students by the end of Year 11. In this, and in retaining the previous good aspects of the school, they have been well supported by the staff and by a dedicated, well-informed governing body. Governors play an active and often practical role in the school, as well as having a good strategic overview. Arrangements for safeguarding meet current government requirements. The school's capacity to improve further is good.

The good curriculum provides students with a wide range of opportunities which promote equality and assist their spiritual, moral and social development. Staff deployment, the grouping of students, the subjects that they follow, and the organisation of their school day, means that provision is carefully tailored to the needs of groups. Further adaptations are made for individuals. For example a small number of students for whom it is suitable are now studying GCSE courses in Years 9 and 10. There is an exciting choice of clubs and societies. The school organises a wide range of multi-agency support for students with complex needs. Parents and carers generally feel that the school keeps them well informed but a few do not.

The school provides staff with individualised training and development. For example, staff who have come from mainstream schools have received support and training to help them to learn about the particular needs of Hednesford students, which has had a considerable impact on their teaching. Staff willingly learn new skills to meet students' needs, such as sign language so that they can communicate with hearing-impaired students.

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 Hednesford Valley High School, Hednesford, WS12 4JS

I enjoyed visiting your school this week with my colleague and finding out about how well you are doing. Thank you for helping us. In particular, a big thank you to the students who talked to us and to the group of students who took me on an excellent tour of the school.

You told us that you think your school is good. We agree with you. Here are some of the reasons.

- You work hard and have good attitudes to learning. You get on with each other well, and work well together in lessons.
- Your attendance at school is very good.
- Your lessons are interesting and exciting. I hope that Year 8 have solved their crime mystery in science!
- You have a very interesting range of clubs to join.
- Because your lessons are good, you make good progress and improve important skills such as reading, writing and getting on well with others.
- Your headteacher and all the other staff give you the support you need.

We have asked the school to do three more things to make it even better.

- Make sure that your targets for your different subjects are always really challenging.
- Think about how to show all the progress you are making with your social and personal skills.
- Give you more responsibility for supporting each other at break and lunchtimes.

I enjoyed meeting you and I wish you every success in the future. Keep working hard.

Yours sincerely

Sue Morris-King
Her Majesty's Inspector

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