

Hele's Trust

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136557
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	395338
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2012
Lead inspector	Karl Sampson HMI

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1322
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Carl Atkinson
Principal	Mr Andrew Birkett
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2007
School address	Seymour Road Plymouth Devon PL7 4LT
Telephone number	01752 337193
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Karl Sampson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Brown	Additional inspector
Kathy Maddocks	Additional inspector
Sue Smith	Additional inspector
Phil Taylor	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors carried out observations of three full lessons, and 32 part lessons taught by 33 teachers. Ten of the lessons were jointly observed with a member of the academy's leadership team. One inspector undertook a learning walk which comprised a number of short visits to lessons to look at provision for lower ability students and students with special educational needs. Inspectors also made short visits to lessons to look at the quality of marking and the progress of higher ability students. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, governors and different groups of students. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the academy's work, and looked at the academy's self-evaluation and planning documents, external evaluations of the academy's work, policy documents and students' work. They analysed 370 inspection questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, questionnaires completed by a sample of students from each year group and 86 completed by staff.

Information about the school

Hele's Trust is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It converted to an academy in April 2011. Most students are of White British heritage and almost all speak English as their first language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below that found nationally. The proportion of students supported by school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. The academy holds modern languages specialist status and is also designated as having further specialisms in mathematics and computing and applied learning. The academy holds Confucius Classroom status in recognition of its work to promote languages and is also designated as a National Support School. The academy meets the government's current floor standard, which sets minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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	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 academy where students achieve well overall and make good progress across most subjects. It is not yet outstanding because there is too much variation in the levels of achievement and quality of teaching across subjects and in the sixth form. As a result, not enough students are attaining at the very highest levels given their above average starting points.
- The climate and ethos of the academy enable all students to grow and flourish both academically and personally. Extensive opportunities exist for students to get involved and take a lead in a diverse programme of activities, which provide a strong foundation for their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
- The principal and senior staff know the academy well. Response to identified weaknesses has been detailed, thoughtful, prompt and constructive, with the impact seen in improvements in teaching and the sixth form. Staff performance is managed effectively. The governing body supports the academy well.
- Teaching is mainly good, with some that is outstanding. The strongest teaching is found where students' achievement is maximised through the use of high-quality questioning and dialogue, challenging tasks and precise subject-specific marking and feedback. Teaching is currently weaker in science, but recent actions undertaken by the academy are beginning to address this successfully.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning and, when given the opportunity, delight in shaping lines of enquiry in lessons to drive learning forward. However, this strong practice is not sufficiently consistent across subjects.
- Targeted professional development, the introduction of a programme to improve literacy skills across the curriculum and the development of classroom practice through the 'learning hubs' are being used well to drive further improvements in teaching.
- The sixth form is satisfactory but is improving rapidly and securely thanks to good leadership and management. Targeted professional development focusing on high quality teaching and a more rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluation to match that found in the main school is successfully reducing the variation in achievement that remains.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve achievement further in the sixth form by:
 - eliminating the variability in progress and attainment between sixth form subjects so that all students are consistently challenged and supported to reach the highest grades.

- Strengthen the overall quality of teaching, especially in science, to achieve greater consistency of good or outstanding practice by:
 - using assessment data so that learning activities are closely aligned to meet individual needs accurately and stretch and challenge all students
 - extending the use of probing questions and high quality dialogue in all lessons to stimulate more active participation from students so that their ideas and contributions have a greater capacity to shape lines of enquiry and drive learning forward
 - ensuring that day-to-day assessment provides students with precise subject-specific guidance which identifies how work can be improved
 - providing routine opportunities for students to respond to teachers' verbal and written comments and engage in a dialogue of learning and assessment.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students are keen to learn and do well. In general, they endeavour to actively engage in lessons, are able to apply skills well to a range of activities, collaborate willingly and use new technologies effectively. Consequently, students make good progress and their attainment is usually significantly above the national average. In 2010 students achieved the academy's best ever results, with 70% gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics. While this improvement stalled somewhat in 2011, attainment was still significantly above average in a number of GCSE subjects at grades A* to C. However, no subjects attained significantly above the national average in terms of gaining A*/A grades. Actions taken by leaders and managers were immediate and improvements to the quality of teaching and the development of literacy skills, alongside a more sophisticated approach to performance tracking, already appear to be having a good effect. Inspection evidence, including the latest analysis of current performance, indicates that progress is once again accelerating. Further analysis shows that boys' progress is accelerating and the gap between boys' and girls' achievement is closing quickly. Academic and personal support for disabled students and those with special educational needs is good and these students continue to make good progress. The very large majority of parents and carers are pleased with the progress made by their children and a wide range of inspection evidence confirms the accuracy of this view.

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While achievement in science is good overall, especially for those students who take the triple science option, students who opted for the core and additional GCSE option have been restricted in their opportunity to access the highest grades. A combination of staffing instability and timetabling constraints had combined to disrupt the continuity of learning for different groups. Current performance data show the positive impact of leaders' and managers' work to tackle weaker performance in science and good plans are in place to adapt the timetable further to meet the specific needs of students from September 2012.

Some variation remains across subjects in the sixth form where students make satisfactory progress overall. Although some make good progress, the proportion attaining the best grades is not yet high enough, given students' starting points. Good leadership has resulted in better systems for matching students to courses and more assiduous use of assessment information to monitor student and subject performance, underpinned by a concerted focus on the development of high-quality teaching. Consequently, the performance of students and subjects has been significantly strengthened and improved teaching is accelerating the rate at which students are making progress over time. Analysis of the work of sixth form students, their performance in lessons and current assessment information show marked improvements in students' achievement. However, it is too early for the impact of these improvements to be seen fully in examination results.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching across the academy is good and improving over time. Students, parents and carers rightly express strong confidence in the quality of teaching overall. However, they recognise that there is still some variation in quality, most notably in science and in the sixth form. Positive relationships are a cornerstone of the academy's success and help to establish an atmosphere conducive to learning. Teachers play a good role in students' social and moral development, expecting good behaviour and encouraging teamwork and harmonious behaviour between different groups of students. An outstanding Year 7 French lesson promoted excellent teamwork and exhilarating opportunities for learning as students were engrossed in compiling a paragraph in the target language. The skilful use of technology to support learners and the development of communication skills and cross-curricular literacy were particularly strong features.

Expectations of students' capabilities have been raised through more stringent use of assessment data to set challenging targets and inform teachers' planning. Learning is strongest where teachers use their acute knowledge of students' individual strengths and weaknesses to deftly target provision to meet their needs and maximise progress through learning activities that provide stretch and challenge for all regardless of starting point. However, this excellent practice is not sufficiently widespread. The best lessons engage students through high-quality questioning and dialogue that helps to foster a deeper understanding and extends thinking. In such cases, students' progress is accelerated because they willingly take the wealth of

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opportunities available to influence and steer learning by developing ideas of their own, acting as partners in the learning process or by learning independently of the teacher. For example, in a Year 9 physical education lesson, the teacher demonstrated the skilful use of assessment information to plan a series of challenging lesson activities that drew students into learning and enabled them to articulate ideas fluently and with confidence. As a result, students were able to manage and develop their own learning with more confidence and by the end of the lesson could develop and apply sophisticated tactics in a game situation. In less effective lessons there is a tendency for teachers to over-direct proceedings which limits opportunities for students to contribute through discussion and help to shape lines of enquiry.

Evidence gathered from a review of some of the students' exercise books across a range of subjects showed that students' work is usually marked frequently and usually offers good pointers for improvement. The most effective teachers know exactly where students are in their learning, understand when they are ready to take the next steps and convey clearly how this can best be achieved. Where students are not expected to respond routinely to written feedback its impact on their progress is diminished.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are confident and happy, both around the academy and in lessons and are emphatic that they feel safe and well cared for. Effective steps are taken to ensure that students understand their role in tackling prejudice and bullying of all kinds and speak knowledgeably about contemporary issues with respect to homophobic and cyber bullying. Students say that there is some low-level bullying in the form of name calling but that it is almost always resolved quickly if reported to staff. Attendance is above average and students are punctual.

Most parents, carers and students agree that standards of behaviour are good. Good behaviour spills over to larger gatherings; in assembly inspectors found students listen attentively and reflect well upon the notion of 'acting with honour'. A few parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaires indicated that there are occasions when learning in lessons can be disrupted by others. Inspectors found that behaviour drops to satisfactory in lessons where the teaching is not sufficiently challenging to capture students' interests. In the most engaging lessons, behaviour was outstanding.

An analysis of the academy's behaviour tracking data indicates that fixed-term exclusions are rare and there has not been a permanent exclusion for five years. They also confirm the effectiveness of the academy's support programme for the small number of students who have difficulty behaving properly and who move to them from other schools where they may have had problems. The work of the student support base, and its success in creating a positive and nurturing atmosphere in which previously disaffected learners and/or those who are potentially vulnerable can thrive, is a valuable aspect of provision.

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Leadership and management

The principal provides clear direction. He is well supported by a capable leadership team and together they have successfully communicated to staff a vision of high expectations for improving the quality of education at Hele's. Leadership and management have been strengthened by restructuring and key appointments to the leadership and management of English, mathematics and the sixth form. At the same time, senior leaders have ensured greater levels of transparency and accountability across the academy. Accurate self-evaluation is used well to define priorities in strategic planning, including for staff development. The academy works well in partnership with other local education providers who share a commitment to developing the academy's role as a local centre for professional development. The academy has successfully established 'learning hubs' and 'Inset Elect' through which staff training can focus on identified priorities arising from the performance management process. Leaders and managers recognise that there is potential for more effective sharing of the best practice in teaching and the use of assessment to ensure greater consistency across teaching groups and enable more students to attain the highest grades. However, strong action, well coordinated by leaders and managers, has resulted in improved provision and outcomes, especially in the sixth form. As a result, teaching has improved securely, with commensurate impact on achievement, and provides good evidence of the academy's capacity to gain further ground.

The academy meets all the statutory requirements for safeguarding and the systems in place are coherent and effective. A strong commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination is at the heart of the academy's work. It provides a personalised curriculum with breadth and balance so that students are able to achieve in ways appropriate to their individual strengths and interests. It is complemented by a good range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities that deepen and broaden students' experience and make a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students' experiences are significantly enhanced by the academy's use of its languages specialism. As a result, they are keen to embrace new challenges, cultures and experiences. Student leadership is developed well through sports leadership, literacy and numeracy leaders and a flourishing combined cadet force. Students are particularly proud of their work with HMS Heroes, a support network for the children of service families in Plymouth schools.

The governing body provides enthusiastic and committed support and plays an effective role in the academy's development. Its input is greatly appreciated, especially by the senior team. Currently, governors are strengthening their links with subjects to complement the mechanisms that are in place to challenge and rectify any underperformance.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



4 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Hele's Trust, Plymouth PL7 4LT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your academy recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up your time to speak to us and to complete the inspection questionnaire. We judged the academy to be good. Mr Birkett and his team set high standards and they are well supported by the other staff and governors. They are all determined that you should have the opportunity to succeed, and their work enables you to achieve well.

The academy's ethos and culture of high expectation and aspiration provide you with a good platform for learning and help you to prepare successfully for life beyond school. You told us you feel safe and your behaviour in and around the academy is good. It is underpinned by good relationships throughout the academy as shown by your positive attitudes in lessons. You make good progress over your time at the academy and enjoy your education because you are well taught. You appreciate the good range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities available to you.

We have asked Mr Birkett and his team to continue raising attainment so that more of you reach the highest grades, and to ensure that teaching continues to improve by:

- raising achievement and the quality of provision across all subjects in the sixth form so that these are in line with the rest of the academy
- ensuring all teachers provide you with challenging learning activities which better meet your individual learning needs
- using dialogue and questions in lessons to deepen your understanding, allowing you enough time to develop and explain your ideas and enabling you to take greater responsibility for your own learning and progress
- ensuring that teachers consistently give you high quality feedback in lessons and on your work to stretch and challenge your thinking and better meet your individual learning needs so that you know how to improve in each subject.

You can certainly help your teachers by responding to their comments and using this subject-specific guidance to improve your learning and the quality of your work.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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