

# Highfields School

Upper Lumsdale, Matlock, DE4 5NA

**Inspection dates** 26–27 September 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The headteacher's inspiring leadership has very successfully ensured improved teaching and learning.
- Staff morale is high. Staff and students work well together, with a shared vision of excellence.
- Underperformance has been tackled robustly and the proportion of good and outstanding lessons is rising steadily because teachers are provided with effective training and support.
- Students are taking more responsibility for their learning, resulting in good levels of engagement in lessons.
- Bullying of any form is not tolerated and the atmosphere in school is calm and purposeful.
- Teachers increasingly provide students with clear objectives and a wide range of stimulating activities in lessons.
- Better teaching, learning and attendance have accelerated the progress students make in lessons.
- Students' achievement in mathematics and English has improved sharply and is now good.
- The school is successfully closing the gaps in performance between students from different backgrounds.
- Overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Students make rapid progress to achieve standards that exceed the national average.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not consistently promote outstanding achievement; in particular, the learning needs of lower-attaining students are not always met fully.
- Some middle leaders are not as effectively involved as the senior leaders in the new procedures for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, of which four were joint observations with senior or middle leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of other short visits to lessons. They also sat in on five tutor groups and two assemblies.
- Meetings were held with five groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and other school staff, including senior and middle leaders. A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 99 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), two emails from parents and the school's most recent parental surveys of 2011.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a number of documents, including the school's own data on students' recent examinations and current progress. They also looked at documentation relating to school development, performance management and the monitoring of teaching, behaviour and attendance, and safeguarding. They also examined the minutes of the governing body's meetings.

## Inspection team

Trevor Riddiough, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jane Guest

Additional inspector

Peter Bailey

Additional inspector

Steven Goldsmith

Additional inspector

Jerry Seymour

Additional inspector

## Full report

*In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.*

### Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a sixth form.
- The school consists of two sites nearly two miles apart. Students in Years 7 and 8 receive their education on one site and the remainder on the larger site.
- A below-average proportion of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The percentages of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported at school action, and by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, are below average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who do not speak English as their first language is well below average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- It is a specialist performing arts school.
- At its last inspection the school was given a notice to improve as significant improvement was needed in the areas of students' achievement and the curriculum.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the level of students' achievement throughout the main school by ensuring that all teachers:
  - consistently match and adapt tasks and activities to the specific learning needs of lower-attaining groups and individuals
  - extend more widely the excellent practice of independent learning found in the sixth form
  - provide planned and coherent opportunities for students to reflect and act on the advice and guidance given by their teachers.
- Enhance the monitoring skills of all middle leaders, ensuring that they focus sharply on evaluating the learning and progress of groups of students across the full ability range.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school with standards of attainment that are above average. By the end of Key Stage 4 students reach levels of attainment that are well above average. This represents good progress from their starting points.
- The latest unvalidated GCSE results show an impressive rate of improvement, particularly in English and mathematics. School leaders have swiftly tackled previous inadequate and weak teaching, and have made changes to the curriculum by introducing courses which have enabled more students to do well. Inspection evidence confirms this sharp upward trend of achievement.
- In the sixth form attainment has risen for the last three years and is high compared to the national averages. Students consistently progress very well in both A-level and AS-level courses.
- The gaps in attainment that previously existed between students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and other groups have closed significantly. This evidence suggests that the school is effectively promoting equal opportunities.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress across the school. This is largely as a result of early diagnosis of their needs, coupled with very effective and tailored support from teachers and teaching assistants.
- The differences in achievement evident previously between and within subjects have been ironed out as a result of a greater consistency in the teaching of good or better lessons. While students say they really enjoy the large majority of lessons, they make less progress where learning activities lack variety and challenge.
- The best learning was seen where teachers gave students opportunities to think issues through for themselves and engage with a variety of interesting and stimulating activities. Students understand what they are going to learn, and at the end of the lesson both the teacher and the students are clear about the levels of success.
- The school tracks closely those students who enter school below the expected level in literacy, and programmes of support are provided to accelerate their reading.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good. This was endorsed by observations during the inspection, the school's own records of teaching quality, and by students. One student summed up the views of many in stating that 'all teachers are working really hard to make the school a better place to learn and they are doing a really good job'. Questionnaire responses show that parents and carers also agree that their children are taught well.
- A key factor is teachers' ability to plan effective strategies that ensure active learning, promote confidence and independence, and engage all students in their learning. This is especially evident in sixth-form lessons. Another factor is that many teachers skilfully pose questions which require students to reply in detail, explain their responses and extend their thinking.
- Teachers and other adults create a positive climate for learning and students appreciate the help they receive from their teachers.
- Teachers assess students' learning and progress regularly. The sharing of targets and current working levels as 'flight paths' enables students to see and value the progress that they are now making.
- Feedback from teachers is given regularly during lessons and through marking in books. Students know, from this approach, where they are and what they need to do next. In

discussions, students say that while they value the advice they are given, not all teachers provide the time and space for them to follow this up.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are well supported by their teachers and teaching assistants, who have sufficient information to manage their learning and provide very effective support within the classroom setting. Occasionally, however, a few lower-attaining students are given tasks that are not so well matched to their needs.
- Opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are often well developed. For example, in a Year 9 assembly, a visitor to the school talked to students about moral themes, while the 'European day of languages' was celebrated across all tutor groups, adding to students' appreciation of other cultures. A Year 7 music lesson very effectively encouraged students to identify and express their moods musically, and in a Year 10 chemistry lesson students were helped to work and collaborate well together to solve scientific problems.
- Support for literacy across the school is effective. For instance, teachers suggest techniques to help students remember key words and phrases, and specialist teaching is provided to groups of weak readers. While the school monitors reading ability closely, the evaluations of these strategies are not developed comprehensively so that interventions can be targeted as accurately as possible.

#### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**

- Students' attitudes to learning are consistently good and learning in lessons is rarely disrupted. In discussions, students describe the school as 'kind', 'happy' and 'peaceful'. They are strongly supportive of the school's positive management of behaviour.
- As a result, students enjoy coming to school. Attendance is rising and is above average across the range of groups.
- All students agree that they feel safe and that any difficulties they may encounter are dealt with rigorously and quickly. The very large majority of parents and carers are positive about behaviour and feel that students are safe and well cared for.
- Students particularly appreciate the provision for identified quiet areas at break and lunch times, and the highly valued 'circle of friends' and peer support.
- Students have a good understanding of different types of bullying. Racism, homophobia and e-safety are comprehensively addressed in assemblies and students' planners, and on the school website.
- The school's behaviour policy is based on the principles of escalating rewards and sanctions. This is reinforced through assemblies, tutor groups, the curriculum, and various brochures such as 'Behaviour Matters', 'Rewards Matters' and 'Safety Matters'. As a result of these arrangements, together with the introduction of wider curriculum choices, behaviour has improved and the number of exclusions has reduced significantly.
- Inspection evidence showed that students are very clear what is expected of them within the school and what is not acceptable, and virtually all live up to these high expectations.

#### **The leadership and management are good**

- The headteacher, with effective support from senior leaders, has established strong leadership and management in the school so that nearly all staff share the drive and ambition for continuous improvement. Consequently, students' achievement is rising securely.
- Actions in addressing issues from the previous inspection have been swift and highly effective. Senior leaders collect information from a wide range of sources in order to inform their self-evaluation. This is accurate and is used effectively to direct the actions which will

have the greatest impact.

- The school has developed monitoring systems that have provided greater accuracy in all aspects of provision, and especially students' academic progress. These systems have had an immediate impact on teaching and learning by enabling the school to provide well-focused training and coaching that are linked to the identified needs of teachers. As a result of effective performance management, both teaching and learning have improved.
- Senior leaders have taken a strong lead on improving teaching and this responsibility is now being devolved to heads of department. Middle leaders are not all, as yet, fully involved in evaluating and improving the quality of provision in their own areas.
- The management of teachers' performance is closely linked to the priorities identified in the school improvement plan, and aimed at securing every student's good achievement. Teachers generally regard these arrangements as helpful and worthwhile in improving their professional practice.
- A coherent strategy to use the pupil premium to target resources is having a positive impact on the achievement of the students concerned.
- The curriculum has improved over the past year and is now good. A full review of the curriculum has been undertaken and this has resulted in the development of a wider range of courses that are more closely matched to the needs and abilities of different groups of students, both in the main school and in the sixth form. However, there remains some variation in performance seen in the slower rates of progress of a small group of the lowest-attaining students in the school.
- The local authority has provided effective support and challenge to the school. Senior staff and heads of department have particularly benefitted from the coaching they received in monitoring teaching and learning and in developing further the quality of teaching.
- The speed and the success of developments over the past year demonstrate a good capacity for further sustained improvement.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - ensures that statutory duties including safeguarding are met
  - has developed a greater understanding of its role and has restructured the governing body in order to closely monitor the impact of the school's actions and measure its progress
  - through the formation of effective committees, has ensured that the headteacher and senior leaders are held to account, especially for students' progress and improving the quality of teaching
  - has addressed the issues raised at the last inspection carefully and thoughtfully
  - rigorously applies performance management procedures to improve the effectiveness of staff.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	112950
<b>Local authority</b>	Derbyshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	399672

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1337
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	215
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Atholl Donaldson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Eddie Wilkes
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 September 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	01629 581888
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