

# The Highfield School

Highfield, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3QA

**Inspection dates** 4–5 June 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	<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		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Examination outcomes are good. Students' achievement at GCSE level is improving.
- The sixth form is good. An increasing proportion of students achieve high grades.
- Students develop good literacy skills. Because of excellent work by staff, they are good readers, articulate and confident.
- Students develop good skills to work on their own and in small groups. They are extremely good at helping each other.
- Much teaching is good or outstanding and continues to improve due to the excellent guidance and support that teachers receive.
- Teachers plan lessons particularly well. As a result, students make good progress.
- Teachers work extremely well with students, to help them understand how they can improve the quality of their work.
- Students' behaviour at break times is particularly good. In lessons, they are very keen learners and enjoy their studies.
- Senior staff have significantly improved the quality of teaching, making good use of the teaching excellence group. The rate of improvement is increasing.
- Extremely strong leadership and management have led to continuous improvement and raised levels of achievement at an increasing rate.
- The school has exceptional arrangements for gaining the views of students and their parents and carers, and consulting with them in detail.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students known to be eligible for free school meals achieve less well in English than their peers, although the gap is closing quickly, following a dip in 2012.
- Behaviour in lessons is very good. However, on a few occasions, students are too passive and not sufficiently involved in learning.
- Staff do not always fully engage students in lessons, or give them opportunities to use their well-developed learning skills.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 43 lessons, including several jointly with senior staff. In addition, the inspection team made a number of other short visits to lessons.
- Inspectors met with leaders and managers, staff and groups of students. They also held discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- Inspectors looked at many examples of students' work, and planning and management documents.
- The inspection team took account of the views of the 85 parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors also took account of the views of the 67 staff who returned questionnaires.

## Inspection team

Derrick Baughan, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rosemary Litawski	Additional Inspector
Gillian Walley	Additional Inspector
Josephine Lewis	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Highfield School is a slightly larger than average secondary school.
- The school recently became part of a co-operative trust, with another local school.
- The very large majority of students are White British.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- About 25% of students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is about average. This is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and those with a parent in the armed forces.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is slightly above the national average, as is the proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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

- Further reduce the gap in achievement between students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are not, by interventions at an earlier stage in these students' time at the school.
- Move the teaching that requires improvement to good and much that is good to outstanding by:
  - helping students to develop even better independent learning skills
  - helping all staff to develop the skills and confidence to allow students to use their independent learning skills and take a greater part in learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' progress in English and mathematics is good. Students join the school with standards that are broadly average, although the proportion of lower achievers is higher than average. The proportion of students who make expected, and better than expected, progress in English and mathematics is improving and now compares favourably with the proportions nationally.
- Examination results are improving. The proportion of students achieving five GCSE A\* to C grades including English and mathematics had been increasing to well above national average, but dipped to just above in 2011. Effective action by the school reversed this decline in 2012. Examination successes already gained and robust school data indicate an even greater improvement this year.
- Students have a very good understanding of topics across a range of subjects. Their work shows that they are making good progress. Discussions with students show that they are very clear and articulate about their success and the good support they get from staff to develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Students enjoy their learning and generally participate very well in both academic and practical subjects. They are keen to learn, and do so quickly. For example, inspectors observed one group of students working on samba rhythms using percussion instruments. They quickly developed their skills at working together as a group and keeping in time with each other.
- Students in the sixth form do well. The percentage of students staying on for both years is increasing and is above the national average. Overall, students achieve at a rate higher than that nationally. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades is increasing year on year and is above the national average.
- Students' literacy skills are very good. They are very articulate and confident when answering questions and expressing their thoughts. For example, during a discussion with inspectors, students discussed in detail the relative merits of having classes of mixed ability groups. Students' writing is good, and younger students are very effective readers.
- The school uses the Year 7 catch-up premium well. It provides a wide range of very effective support to help students who were behind in literacy at their primary schools, so that they improve their literacy and other skills. The reading groups for Year 7 students are particularly supportive, and the students develop excellent skills in dealing with difficult words. As a result, they develop the confidence to tackle new and challenging words.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs reach their targets. Generally, their achievements are in line with national averages, but students with a statement of special educational needs do much better than the national average.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium. The school has a wide range of interventions focused on meeting specific student needs. Much of this work is effective but it focuses on students from Year 9 onwards.
- Students for whom the school receives the pupil premium do not do as well in English as their peers and this gap widened in 2012, partly because of the change in grade boundaries in English. In 2012, students known to be eligible for free school meals attained, on average, one

and a half grades lower than their classmates in English and half a grade in mathematics. Examination results already received and current school data show that the school has quickly closed the gap this year.

### **The quality of teaching** is good

- Teachers have very high expectations of students and ensure that they can meet them by carefully planning lessons to meet individual needs. Teachers are good at setting targets that challenge all students, regardless of the speed at which they work. The school has improved this aspect well since the last inspection and, as a result, all students make good progress in most lessons.
- The whole school has worked well to develop students' abilities to work on their own and in small groups. Students use these skills well to help themselves and each other. They have the confidence to offer support when they see other students struggling. Teachers generally use a variety of activities to enable the students to use these skills.
- Teachers are extremely good at checking students' progress over time. Marking has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The use of the 'medal and mission' system, introduced in September 2012, involves the recognition of good work and identifying how students can improve. A recent development to focus even more closely on the student response to this has already resulted in some outstanding examples of a rich dialogue between teachers and students.
- Teachers are highly effective at using every opportunity to help students develop their reading and writing skills. Marking in all subjects focuses well on literacy and the use of accurate and appropriate language. In lessons, teachers work well with students to develop their speaking skills and confidence.
- Teaching and support in class are adapted well to meet the needs of disabled students, those who have special educational needs and those who are eligible for the pupil premium. Teachers work extremely well with teaching assistants to ensure they meet these students' needs.
- Teachers use questioning well to check students' progress in understanding their subjects. Teachers develop and explore students' responses to questions to ensure that they fully understand the subject. Most teachers use discussion well to ensure all students take an active part on their lessons. However, on a few occasions students are not sufficiently well engaged in studying.

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

- Students' behaviour around the school is good. Staff, students and parents speak highly of the improvement in behaviour, both in lessons and around the school.
- The school's attendance policies have been highly effective at reducing quickly the number of students who are persistently absent and the total number of lessons missed. As a result, over the past year, absences have reduced from well above the national average to just below average. Students attend well and are punctual.
- The school's own inclusion unit is an outstanding example of dealing with students who might otherwise be excluded. This unit is highly effective at providing specific responses to meet

students' needs and is integrated well with the whole school. As a result, the school has significantly reduced the number of exclusions.

- Staff and students speak highly of the effective behaviour management policies. Staff use these well to ensure that lessons are not disrupted. Indeed, one student stated, 'Staff are now comfortable using the behaviour ladder.' Students also believe that having the detention board in a position visible to the whole school is a positive feature. The number of recorded incidents has dropped significantly.
- The school deals well with bullying. Staff and students do not consider this a concern, although a few parents did raise this as an issue. Students have a good understanding of bullying and express this articulately. For example, when asked what bullying was, one student said, 'It is when you treat someone in a way that upsets them.'
- Students' attitudes to learning are good, and inspectors saw no examples of any disruptive behaviour. However, on a few occasions some students were sitting passively in lessons without being involved in learning.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The headteacher's relentless focus on continuous improvement has resulted in clear and sustainable changes for the better. Staff at all levels share the clear vision for the school's strategic direction. As a result, the school manages change exceedingly well, for example, the recent change to trust status. The rate at which improvement actions are having a positive impact is increasing.
- Staff are unanimously proud of being a part of the school and morale is exceedingly high. They are also unanimous in their beliefs about how well the school is led and managed, the quality of education that the students receive, and the part that the staff play in this. As a result, the school is an excellent example of joint working and has an outstanding capacity to improve. As one member of staff said, 'Everyone bought into the Co-operative Trust charter and we have a common goal.'
- Staff lead the sixth form very well. It is part of a consortium arrangement and extremely effective joint working ensures that students have the best range of courses to meet their needs. Stay-on rates are consistently above the national average. Staff rigorously monitor results and know very well every detail of performance. Advice and guidance for sixth form students, and those about to go into the sixth form, are extremely good.
- Teaching is improving because of the robust, but supportive, approach to staff development. Senior leaders make very good use of the work of the teaching excellence group, made up of staff at all levels, to share good practice and help staff to develop their skills. Staff are unanimous about the positive way they are held to account and the support that they receive to improve.
- Arrangements for monitoring and improving the quality of teaching are very thorough. Joint observations with inspectors show that senior staff are exceedingly good at identifying strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Staff use the results of observations well, and the recently introduced 'pre-capability' process is highly effective in either helping staff to develop, in a supportive way, or quickly identifying those for whom capability procedures have to be used.
- The school ensures particularly well that that study options for students are flexible and

responsive. The school does not offer just a fixed curriculum but a highly adaptive one that meets the needs of all students very well, while ensuring that students study what they need to do to equip them well for the next stage of their lives.

- Students are especially proud of the wide range of clubs and sporting activities that are available after school, and the opportunity that the school provides for students to study at school and after school. Students participate fully in after-school activities, which clearly help them develop interests and experience that they take beyond the school gates. For example, students spoke extremely highly of the school's drama productions in which they have been involved.
- The school uses assemblies, tutor-group lessons and religious education lessons extremely well to develop students' understanding of social, moral, spiritual, and cultural matters. For example, inspectors observed one engaging assembly which focused well on mutual respect. In other subjects, teachers focus well on cultural issues.
- The school promotes equality well. The school is an integrated community with staff and students working well together towards common goals. Diversity is celebrated and students have a good understanding of others' points of view.
- Staff manage resources well. The school is about to be rebuilt; however, the existing site is well maintained. Leaders consider and consult well about the best way to use resources; for example, they established the inclusion unit in the middle of the school site to ensure it is fully a part of the school. The school is exceptionally good at consulting with students, and their parents and carers, about decisions to do with resources and finance.
- Staff at all levels, and students and their parents and carers, are involved in providing feedback on how well the school is performing. Self-evaluation is thorough and the school knows itself well. Senior leaders monitor well progress toward implementing improvement actions. Staff are unanimous in saying that they play a major part in this improvement work and they have the confidence to try out ideas themselves.
- The school has outstanding arrangements for getting the views of students and their parents and carers. Parental survey responses are very positive and the school is effective at getting a response rate of about 50%. Each year, the school invites parents of Year 7 students to join a focus group for that intake for the duration of their time in the school. The school consults regularly with these groups and responds extremely quickly to issues raised.
- The school works well with and is supported by the local authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governance is very strong. Governors have an extremely good knowledge of how the school works and they are rigorous in ensuring that they meet their statutory responsibilities. Governors know well the school's strengths and those areas where it needs to improve. They are clear about, and fully involved in, how the school monitors and improves the quality of teaching through performance management, including linking this to pay. Governors have strong links with all departments and use them extremely well to hold the school to account for the delivery of challenging targets, such as closing the attainment gap between those students eligible for the pupil premium and those not. Governors work very closely with the headteacher and senior staff, who they hold to account rigorously for all the decisions that the school makes and how it uses pupil premium, and staff promotion and salary progression. Governors are fully involved in discussions and decisions about strategic direction and school development.

## 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>	117537
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	401674

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>	Maintained
<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>	1032
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	172
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Keith Robertson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ian Morris
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 February 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 620500
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