

Holmer Green Senior School

Parish Piece, Holmer Green, High Wycombe, HP15 6SP

Inspection dates 16–17 January 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Requires improvement 3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement 3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement 3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement 3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Achievement requires improvement because results are not improving rapidly enough in GCSE English.
- Gaps in the performance of different groups are not narrowing quickly enough in English. This is because progress and achievement are not good enough for the students who are supported by the pupil premium funding.
- The sixth form requires improvement as students are not making good progress in a wide enough range of subjects.
- Across subjects, there are too few opportunities for students to improve their writing skills.
- Pupil premium funding does not make a good enough impact on students eligible for it.
- Although there are examples of high-quality teaching, it is not consistently good. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations or plan activities that help students to make the best progress. Because students in classes complete similar work, it is often too hard for some and too easy for others.
- Marking does not always provide students with clear guidance on how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.
- Leaders, managers and governors have not ensured that teaching and achievement are consistently good. Leaders' and managers' evaluations of the impact of their work are sometimes too generous, and not accurate enough to inform the next steps to raise standards.

The school has the following strengths:

- Achievement in mathematics, modern foreign languages and technology is improving rapidly.
- There are examples of strong teaching in mathematics and technology.
- Relationships between students and with staff are a real strength. Students are proud to attend the school and are full of praise for the extra support and help they receive.
- Students enjoy coming to school. They say they feel very safe and well cared for within what they see as a secure and harmonious community. Bullying is dealt with effectively by staff.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 35 lessons, of which six were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, they made a number of shorter visits to year assemblies and tutorial sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the school’s leadership and groups of staff.
- Members of the inspection team held meetings with four groups of students representing all age groups in the school. Discussions also took place with students informally.
- Additional meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and vice chair, and the local authority school improvement partner.
- The inspection team observed the school’s work and scrutinised documents, including the school’s own evaluation of how well it is doing, the school improvement plan and statistical information about students’ achievement, attendance and exclusions.
- There were 75 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 48 responses to the staff questionnaires. Additional comments were received from parents and carers, and consideration was given to the views expressed by students and families in response to the school’s own surveys.

Inspection team

Rob Ridout, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Elizabeth Bull	Additional Inspector
Karen Roche	Additional Inspector
Mireille Drayton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Holmer Green Senior School converted to become an academy in April 2012. When the predecessor school was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good.
- The school is a smaller-than-average sized non-selective secondary school in a local authority which operates a selective system.
- The school has a sixth form and specialist status for business and enterprise.
- Over 85% of the students are from White British, Irish, Other White or Mixed White backgrounds. The proportion from minority ethnic groups is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of students who speak English as their first language is above average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is well below the national average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Around 11% of the students are disabled or have special educational needs. The proportion of students supported by school action is below average and the proportions identified with school action plus and those with a statement of special educational need are above national averages.
- A small number of students attend alternative programmes at the Aylesbury Centre.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching so that it is routinely good or better by ensuring that all teachers:
 - have higher expectations of all students
 - use available assessment information on students' prior learning to match work better to the needs of students so that it both challenges the more able and better supports the least able for the next steps in their learning
 - provide consistently positive and constructive feedback to students that helps them know what and how to improve their work and follow this up to check that students have acted upon the comments and can show that they have a better knowledge and understanding.
- Improve the achievement of students by:
 - increasing the proportion of students making good progress in English in Key Stages 3 and 4, especially the more able and students who benefit from pupil premium funding
 - supporting better writing skills in all subject areas
 - building on the improving picture in the sixth form so that more students make good progress and achieve good outcomes in most A- and AS-level subjects.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels, especially for governors and middle leaders, by consistently and robustly analysing information about the quality of teaching, accurately evaluating the impact of the school's work on students' learning from their varied starting points, and using the outcomes more effectively to plan the next steps to raise the quality of teaching.
- An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium, should be undertaken in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and governance may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because, although the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSEs at A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been in line with the national averages in recent years, this does not represent good overall progress for students. Attainment in both English and mathematics is broadly average and the number of students making expected progress in mathematics has risen rapidly. However, fewer students reach the standards expected of them in English and too few students, including those from minority ethnic groups, make good progress in both English and mathematics.
- School leaders are taking action to improve students' achievement in English. Senior staff now meet to review the impact of the school's work on students' progress in English and, as a result, achievement is beginning to rise.
- GCSE results in technology were strong in 2013 and school data for 2014 show that students are making significantly better progress in science and humanities subjects.
- One student attends courses at the Aylesbury Centre. Progress and attendance are closely tracked and with the support they are receiving, achievement is good.
- A significant number of students join the school with weak reading skills and are supported well using Year 7 catch-up funding. A good range of interventions, including the 'star' programme, combined with a whole-school focus on literacy support in lessons, are securing good improvements in the reading ages of students during their first year at the school.
- Students who are disabled or have special educational needs make progress similar to that of other students. Students supported at school action plus make good progress. This is because of the additional lessons, personal coaching and targeted support they receive.
- The gap between the achievement of students supported by the pupil premium and that of their peers in school has narrowed over the last few years in both mathematics and English. However, while the difference in mathematics is now on average only half a grade due to better teaching and extra support, the gap in English that remains is almost one full grade and it is too early to comment on the impact of recent changes in support for these students, although the first indications are positive.
- Additional staffing and support help less-able students in Year 7 to catch up in English and mathematics and settle into life at the school. Standards in literacy are rising because students are encouraged to read more often, by themselves and to each other. Best practice to support and develop writing skills effectively is not consistent across the whole school.
- The sixth form requires improvement. Students achieve well in English at A level, but there remains too much variation between subjects. AS-Level results have been rising and more students now attain grades in line with or better than the national averages. Results are improving quickly in some of the more recently introduced vocational courses including communication, physical education and science.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching requires improvement because not enough is good or outstanding to promote good progress. Too often teachers' planning of learning does not offer the right level of challenge to all students. Teaching is often pitched only at the level of average ability students, so it is not demanding enough for the most able students to make the rapid, sustained progress of which they are capable of, and also means it is often too difficult for less-able students.
- Support assistants are not always used as well as they might be. Many support individual learners in classrooms and are most effective where teachers fully involve them in their planning and direct their support well, however this is not consistently the case. Similarly teachers do not always check students' knowledge or understanding often enough during the lessons and so some students are not challenged enough.

- When teachers' questioning is skilful it builds students' understanding and helps them to produce extended answers. For example, in a mathematics lesson groups of Year 8 students were engaged in a challenging exercise to provide a detailed answer about how to determine the capacity of objects. They showed real confidence in the execution of the task, thoroughly enjoyed the challenge and made rapid progress. Teaching at this level is too seldom evident.
- Some teachers mark students' work regularly and provide good written feedback to help students understand how and what to improve. In the most effective subjects, students are often encouraged to mark and discuss each other's work before making improvements which are then confirmed by the teacher following up students' corrections. This is not common place and sometimes leads to the repetition of work and slows students' progress.
- There are strengths in teaching. Teachers foster good relationships and there is generally mutual respect between adults and students, leading to a positive atmosphere for learning.
- Teaching of humanities, mathematics, modern foreign languages and technology is increasingly both challenging and enjoyable and this is starting to boost progress. Many students say that they particularly enjoy the opportunities to work with others on solving problems.
- The school has a clear strategy to develop reading skills beyond English lessons and there are examples of good practice. Library lending rates have significantly risen in recent years. The school is aware of the need to develop good practices to improve students' skills in writing across all subjects, but there is no clear strategy yet as to how they will be delivered.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving, but the better quality beginning to be seen this year has not had time to have a full impact on students' achievement, which is not yet good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement because, while most students settle well and show good attitudes to learning, too many do not take responsibility for their own conduct and are immature in their actions towards others. They lose interest and chat among themselves rather than working. A few disrupt learning.
- The building works currently going on have placed abnormal pressures on the corridors and stairwells, especially between lessons. The majority of students move around the school in a sensible way but a small number do not. Little litter was seen about the building.
- Some staff expressed concerns about students' behaviour, and particularly the consistency with which it is managed in lessons. School leaders are working to ensure that staff manage behaviour in the same way. Most parents and carers responding to the online survey, Parent View, believe that behaviour is well managed.
- Attendance is in line with the national average and the numbers of exclusions are low compared to the national averages.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are aware of the dangers of the internet and of other potential threats to themselves, including from outside the school. They report that they feel safe.
- Students have a good understanding of the dangers of different forms of bullying and express confidence that the school will deal effectively with any incidents. The work of the Anti-Bullying Counsel is effective and is soon to receive the Diana Award in recognition of its good work. The school promotes equality of opportunity, positive relationships and ensures discrimination of any type is not tolerated.
- Parents, carers and staff confirm the views expressed by students and believe the school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. A large majority of parents and carers would recommend the school to other families.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because, although teaching and learning are improving, there remains too much teaching that is less than good.
- The governing body and school leaders have clear expectations about the ethos of the school resulting in high levels of pastoral care. As a consequence of leaders managing the impact of a significant building programme to enhance facilities, their focus has not been strong enough on teaching. Teachers' expectations about what students can achieve have not been challenging enough and there has been insufficient emphasis on accelerating students' progress. Revised tracking systems introduced this year are helping but it is too early to judge their impact.
- Senior leaders and those in charge of subjects are becoming more challenging about the progress of students when checking teaching. However, subject leaders do not hold teachers in their departments to account robustly enough for students' achievement. Monitoring is not yet frequent or rigorous enough to ensure that practices are consistently applied to bring about the rapid improvements needed to raise standards.
- Leaders' evaluation of how well the school is doing has been overgenerous, particularly about the impact of teaching on students' achievement. Systems for monitoring the work of the school are not applied robustly enough by all leaders.
- Systems for managing the performance of teachers link successful pay progression to targets for students' achievement, but these need to be more rigorously checked. Leaders know the strengths and areas for development of staff but teachers say better training is needed to help them improve teaching faster.
- In the sixth form, leaders and managers provide good care and support for students but have not sufficiently focused on achievement. Recently introduced tracking systems are helping identify the support students need to increase their progress. This has led to higher proportions of students securing better results in vocational qualifications and at both AS and A level.
- The curriculum caters well for the needs of all students and provides good progression through the school. Reading is well supported and plans to improve writing skills through all subjects are being prepared. Students value the additional time teachers give to them and recognise that they benefit from a large range of enrichment activities including after-school homework clubs, sporting clubs and visits in preparation for their next steps into work or further education.
- The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is supported both by the curriculum and the wider life of the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements are well established and comply fully with requirements. The school takes the protection of its students very seriously.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body has challenged the school over the years to raise achievement, and has been successful in improving attainment in terms of the proportion of students leaving school with five or more good GCSE grades including English and mathematics. This has ensured these students are better prepared for the next stage of their education. However, the governing body is not challenging school leaders to improve progress for all because its members have an incomplete understanding of school data. The spending of the pupil premium is not rigorously checked by governors and this has led to inconsistencies in its impact from year to year. Its members are aware of how school leaders check on the quality of teaching but do not have high enough expectations of staff or the link between pay progression and good teaching.

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

Unique reference number	138058
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	431805

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	845
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	121
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Penny Todd
Headteacher	Mike Jones
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01494 712 219
Fax number	01494 711 103
Email address	mjones5@blpmail.org.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

