

The Heights Free School

Heys Lane, Blackburn, Lancashire, BB2 4NW

Inspection dates 11–12 September 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The leaders, managers and governors have made strong links with parents, other schools and external agencies to enable students to be well prepared and supported for their future in modern Britain.
- Leaders have established a culture of sharing good ideas and practices amongst teachers and are responsive to suggestions for improvement. As a result the quality of teaching is improving quickly.
- Teachers know the students well. The good relationships they forge ensure students behave well and are ready to learn and develop confidence in their own abilities.
- Students are encouraged to have high aspirations and respond well to most challenges. Achievement in vocational subjects is particularly good.
- Students make good progress in literacy, numeracy and computing in all subject areas. Students who struggle with reading catch up as a result of effective extra reading sessions.
- Students are proud of their school. They say it is a welcoming environment in which to learn. The students are a credit to the school.
- Parents feel their children are safe, happy and making good progress. Safeguarding arrangements meet all the required regulations.
- Partner schools have high regard for the impact The Heights Free School has on developing their students' social, moral and cultural attitudes.
- The school evaluates its own effectiveness as good and inspectors gathered evidence that confirmed this judgement to be accurate.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding. As a result there is not enough growth in students' skills, knowledge and understanding in some subjects.
- A minority of students do not make accelerated progress and close the gap between the level of their learning with that of their peers.
- Marking of students' work is not consistently good. It does not always help students to improve their work.
- The governing body could improve how they monitor and evaluate the school and the quality of teaching and achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 15 lessons, five jointly with the head of school. Inspectors observed lunchtime activities, and students' behaviour at social times and as they moved about the school. A range of students' responses to learning was also examined.
- Inspectors visited all parts of the school site.
- A meeting was held with a group of students in Key Stage 4 in order to gather their views about the school and inspectors spoke with students in lessons and around the school. Inspectors listened to students reading.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, members of the senior leadership team and other staff, and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of the views held by parents, students, and partner schools.. There were insufficient responses on Parent View to access further views. An inspector spoke to a parent who contacted the school during the inspection. Twenty-nine questionnaires completed by staff were also taken into account.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation including: information on students' progress and attainment and ways in which these are tracked and monitored; teachers' assessment and planning; the school's self-evaluation and development plans; and a range of policies and procedures relating to the quality of teaching and management of staff performance. The inspectors took account of the school's procedures for safeguarding including referrals to the local authority, as well as records relating to attendance and behaviour. Governing body documentation, including the headteacher's report to the governing body, links with external agencies, other schools and the wider community, and the school's website were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Christina McIntosh, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Nixon

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Heights Free School opened in September 2013 as part of the Education Partnership Trust which works in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Education Improvement Partnership as a corporate member of the Trust. Members of the Education Improvement Partnership include all secondary schools, Academies, Free Schools, a Special School, Pupil Referral Unit and a Studio School in Blackburn with Darwen. The Trust structure includes a board of directors and Local Governing Body.
- The school provides alternative provision for up to 90 students aged between 8 and 16. The 63 students currently on roll are in Key Stage 4. There are twice as many Year 11 students as Year 10 students. There are a similar number of boys and girls in the key stage.
- The majority of students are dual registered (enrolled at more than one school) and attend the school for five days a week. A small proportion attends on a part-time basis for two days a week and spends the rest of the week under the responsibility of their base school.
- A large proportion of students are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium funding. Most students have poor attendance prior to joining the school.
- The majority of students are White British and a small number speak English as an additional language.
- On admission to the school the majority of students are below their chronological reading and spelling ages and have low attainment in English and mathematics. The majority of students have been identified by the referring schools as having additional needs: a small proportion of these students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school accesses the small animal care course at Myerscough College for its students. No students were attending the course at the time of inspection.
- The Heights Free School accesses support for students from the local authority social care services, Engage, Lifeline, the Brook centre, Supporting Families, East Lancashire Child and Adolescent Service, Youth Offending Team and the educational psychology service.
- The Heights Free School offers nurture and anger-management support to students from the following schools as part of their alternative provision packages: Key Stage 2 schools – Avondale Primary School, Brookhouse Primary School, Longshaw Junior School, Lower Darwen Primary School, Roe Lee Park Primary School, Shadsworth Junior School, St Aidan's CE Primary School, St Alban's RC Primary School, St Anthony's RC Primary School, St Barnabus and St Paul's CE Primary School, St James CE Primary School, St Luke and St Philip's Primary School, St Matthew's CE and Brunel Nursery, St Peter's RC Primary School, St Silas CE Primary School, St Thomas CE Primary School and Sudell Primary School. Key Stage 3 schools – Blackburn Central High School, Darwen Vale High School, Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School and the schools that commission placements listed below.
- The following schools have commissioned places at The Heights Free School; most, but not all students, are dual registered: Witton Park Academy, Pleckgate High School, Darwen Vale Academy, Blackburn Central, St Wilfrid's CE Academy, Our Lady and St John Catholic School, St Bede's RC High School, Darwen Aldridge Community Academy, Blakewater College and Waterloo Lodge.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the achievement of a minority of students by increasing the level and consistency of challenge in lessons.
- Ensure marking and feedback highlights what improvements students need make to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Bring together information and data to facilitate deeper analysis and, as a result:
 - enable reports to parents to be more relevant
 - keep the website up to date
 - share governors' evaluations of the school's progress with all interested parties.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher has established a positive culture for the school's future development and acts quickly and decisively to rectify any concerns. She is well supported by her senior leadership team who work collaboratively to improve the quality of teaching and learning and prepare students for their futures. For example, all last year's Year 11 leavers are engaged in further education, employment or training.
- The leadership team has made good links with a wide range of appropriate agencies to support the well-being of students so they can receive the support they need at the appropriate time, quickly re-engage with learning and succeed. Senior leaders are tenacious in ensuring referrals to agencies are followed up and resolved.
- The culture and ethos of the school encourages a caring and supportive environment in which learning and good behaviour can flourish.
- Monitoring and evaluation is good in most areas of the school and very good in some. However, it is not as effective as it could be because changes in the school's systems have slowed the ability to analyse and evaluate data holistically to inform future developments within the school and share with the wider community.
- The school adds value to the pupil premium spend of other schools as students' performance is monitored closely and gaps in progress are addressed and reported to the commissioning schools.
- The school has improved the admission arrangements with commissioning schools by requesting more detailed information, including expected outcomes. As a result teachers are better informed and respond more quickly to the personal, social and learning needs of the individual student and put in appropriate early intervention strategies.
- Reports to commissioning schools about students' achievement are effective. Reports are less effective for parents as they tend to be rather general about attitude and contain little detail about the skills, knowledge and understanding the individual is gaining and how this can be supported at home.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs and interests of the students with a range of vocational subjects including construction, creative digital media, sport, business, hair and beauty, childcare, and performing arts; alongside GCSEs in English, mathematics, art and physical education. Students are encouraged to lead healthy lives and access a range of outdoor and sports awards.
- The school prepares students well for active citizenship in modern Britain through work-related learning and external careers education and guidance. Religious education is delivered through an approved programme to develop key skills and life skills and through assemblies. It is broadly Christian and takes account of other diverse faiths and religions in Britain and the school encourages respect and tolerance towards others.
- A senior leader is trained to work on the Prevent agenda and has the knowledge and skills to ensure staff and students are aware of their responsibilities to prevent extremism and radicalisation.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate; however, the success and development of the school since it opened is not shared as widely as it could be because some of the information on the school website is not up to date. The school should rectify this as soon as possible.
- Performance management is used effectively to improve outcomes for students and inform governors about the quality of teaching in the school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - After a self-review of governance the governing body has extended its range of skills by increasing new members from the local community to support their strategic and long-term plans. The governing body carries out all its statutory duties.
 - Governors systematically challenge senior leaders and offer support to improve the quality of teaching and students' achievement; for example, by setting up observations of outstanding practice in partner schools. However, the governing body's evaluation of the development and success of the school and its students is not shared effectively with all stakeholders.
 - Governors have a good understanding of performance data regarding the quality of teaching and the achievement of students in different subjects and year groups. Senior leaders tackle underperformance in a supportive and robust manner with the support of the governing body.
 - The governing body are transparent and accountable and ensure the efficient management of financial resources.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Students are usually focused, engaged and ready to learn. Students say that there are very few disturbances to lessons and staff respond well to enable learning to continue.
- Students inspectors spoke with were positive about the difference attending The Heights Free School was making to their progress and engagement with learning. They talked positively about their futures and had high aspirations. No concerns were raised about students' behaviour by parents, staff or students during the inspection.
- The number of recorded behaviour incidents over the past year has reduced significantly and the school's monitoring reflects that incidents are followed up and resolved appropriately: both within school and when they require support from outside agencies.
- The school has had one fixed-term exclusion and no permanent exclusions since opening.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students are able to take age-appropriate risks and feel safe in school. Staff and students get along well together and are supportive with each other. Staff and students know how to access help and support when it is needed. The designated safeguarding lead trains staff about a wide range of safeguarding issues: including female genital mutilation.
- Students have a good awareness of different forms that bullying can take and their knowledge of e-safety is very good. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' learning encourage students to keep themselves and others safe and to be aware of risks associated with sexual exploitation, breaking the law, radicalisation, and other negative or discriminatory behaviours.
- The school's pastoral support review highlights how well the students are supported to look after and manage themselves and others in the community. The impact of the school's counsellor and anger-management sessions reflect an increasing trend of students meeting their social, emotional and behaviour targets.
- Overall attendance is low, but improving. There has been an increase in attendance since the school opened and persistent absenteeism has reduced. The majority of students have significantly improved their attendance at school since joining The Heights Free School. For example, one student's attendance increased from 70% to 93% and another student's attendance improved from 31% to 82%. Absences are followed up very quickly and involve good communication with the family and appropriate external agencies to help students attend regularly.
- Recruitment and vetting practices are secure and safeguarding young people is a regular input in staff training.
- Classrooms and vocational workshops are well organised and resourced appropriately for learning in a safe environment. The safety of the site was evaluated during the inspection and the school responded promptly to resolve concerns raised.

The quality of teaching is good

- The school's judgement of the quality of teaching as good was confirmed through inspectors' observations of lessons and scrutiny of the school's evidence about teaching and achievement since the school opened.
- Information from commissioning schools is widely distributed along with robust baseline information on entry to the school to enable teachers to promptly address the needs of the students. Assessment is holistic so that teachers are aware of individual barriers to learning in order to address gaps in learning, as well as to extend prior knowledge.
- A key strength of the school is the positive relationships between staff and students that create a positive climate for learning in lessons.
- The majority of teachers have high expectations. They plan and deliver lessons that extend students' skills, knowledge and understanding and adapt their teaching and assessment methods to enable all students to learn effectively.
- Most teachers challenge students in lessons. For example, in a climbing-wall activity teachers encouraged students to progress through three different grades of severity. However, when students demonstrate they are re-engaged in learning and ready for greater challenge, this challenge is not consistently applied across the school. As a result some students, including the disadvantaged and most able, do not get enough opportunities to deepen their learning and make accelerated progress.
- Students have access to high-quality resources, are encouraged to present their work well and listen and respond to others politely. As a result students have a pride in their school.

- Teachers regularly mark books and give verbal feedback. However, there is less evidence of students acting on the advice given and self-correcting to deepen their understanding.
- Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught effectively and included in the planning of other subjects to reinforce the skills across the curriculum. For example, in a hair and beauty session students were working with a member of the public and altering their speech appropriately. Reading ages have increased as a result of reading being a regular part of the tutorial programme.
- Most teachers make good use of other adults in the classrooms and workshops to support the learning of students. However, not all teachers use this support to help record the gains in individual student's skills, knowledge and understanding, as well as their behaviour and attitudes.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students make good progress, based on their starting points when they join the school, according to the school's tracking and information data. The school uses robust baseline assessment alongside prior attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 to set challenging targets for students.
- Students enter the school with varied prior experience but, in the main, their levels of attainment are low and previous school attendance has been fragmented.
- The school's tracking data and evidence from students' work in books, since the school opened, show students have made progress over time. The majority of students make gains in their literacy and numeracy.
- Students' reading levels have increased since joining The Heights Free School as evidenced when listening to students read and robust reassessment of their levels by the school.
- Students make gains in their behaviour, confidence and self-esteem and this is also tracked by the school. This was demonstrated by students' responsiveness and willingness to demonstrate their ambitions during the inspection. For example, one student shared his desire to get a university education and another his success in a national sporting competition.
- Disadvantaged students make similar gains as others attending the school.
- The most able students make similar gains to others attending the school.
- Good attainment in vocational courses at the end of the school's first year enabled all Year 11 students to successfully transfer into further education, training or employment.
- Parents, students and staff comments, received during the inspection, are positive about the progress being made and the support offered by the school. Positive comments from parents and commissioning schools reflect the added value to students who attend The Heights Free School regarding improved behaviour, confidence, communication skills, as well as subject-specific skill 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

Unique reference number	139413
Local authority	Blackburn with Darwen
Inspection number	442677

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

Type of school	Free school – alternative provision
School category	Free school
Age range of pupils	8–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy Burton
Headteacher	Belinda Logan
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01254 261655
Fax number	01254 267240
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