

Hele's Trust

Seymour Road, Plymouth, PL7 4LT

Inspection dates 30 April – 01 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Students in Years 9 to 11 make insufficient progress in English. In the GCSE examinations in 2014, too few students attained grades A* to C in English.
- Too many students in Years 9 to 11, do not read widely. They have too few opportunities to develop sophisticated writing skills.
- While most of the teaching is effective, teachers do not always ensure that students understand technical vocabulary, for example in drama.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that weaknesses in students' achievement in English have been rectified with sufficient speed.
- The curriculum in Years 9 to 11 does not place sufficient emphasis on developing literacy skills.
- Students in Years 9 to 11 are not given sufficiently regular homework in English.

The school has the following strengths

- Students' achievement over time in some subjects, including mathematics and history, has remained high. In others including science, modern foreign languages and geography, achievement has improved significantly.
- The governing body is well-informed and has been successful in challenging leaders to improve, for example, in the sixth form.
- Students behave well, especially around the academy. Students and their parents agree that they are safe in the academy.
- In most subjects, notably science, effective action by senior leaders has ensured that teaching has improved.
- The sixth form has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Students make equally good progress in all subjects and achieve well.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 42 lessons. In addition, inspectors made briefer visits to a number of lessons in order to pursue a theme, such as the development of students' literacy skills. Nearly half of these activities were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors scrutinised the written and other work of groups of students, notably in English, history and geography, in order to determine their progress over a period of time.
- Inspectors reviewed documents, including those relating to students' attainment and progress, behaviour and safeguarding. They also analysed information supplied by the academy concerning the attainment and progress of current students.
- Meetings were held with staff, members of the governing body and with three groups of students. Telephone conversations were held with an external consultant employed by the academy and with the leader of alternative provision.
- The views of 42 parents who submitted them on the Ofsted online (Parent View) survey were analysed and taken into account, as were a very small number of other communications from parents. The views of 103 staff who completed a questionnaire were also considered.

Inspection team

Paul Sadler, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lesley Greenway	Additional Inspector
Kevin Wright	Additional Inspector
Neil Blundell	Additional Inspector
Stephen Lee	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The academy is of above average size when compared with secondary schools nationally.
- The school converted to academy status in 2011. It was formerly called Hele's School and is usually called by this name by parents and students.
- While the academy does not have formal links with other schools, it is in a collaboration with three local secondary schools, Ridgeway, Coombe Dean and Plymstock for its sixth form provision. Some minority subjects are taught at one school only, with students from the other schools attending lessons in the relevant venue.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or have special educational needs is below average. Most of these students have moderate learning or behavioural difficulties, although some have more profound needs.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, and for children who are looked after) is average.
- The academy occasionally uses alternative provision, mainly for the education of students experiencing educational difficulties. At the time of the inspection only one such provider, ACE (Alternative Complementary Education Services), a local outreach service, was being used.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The Principal has given notice of his retirement in August 2015. The governing body has appointed an existing vice Principal to take over from September 2015. The appointment of two new assistant Principals is pending.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality and scope of students' literacy skills by:
 - promoting extensive reading of both fiction and non-fiction texts that are written in a wide range of styles and for a variety of purposes
 - ensuring that students have plenty of opportunities to write at length and for a range of purposes in all subjects
 - ensuring that students understand the technical vocabulary used in all subjects.
- Ensure that all students achieve well in English, especially in Years 9 to 11, by:
 - quickly correcting any weaknesses in students' basic reading and writing skills
 - placing greater emphasis on the development of sophisticated writing skills in GCSE English and other subjects
 - ensuring that students are given regular, challenging English homework.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - weaknesses in the teaching of English and wider literacy are rectified speedily
 - the whole curriculum places adequate emphasis on the development of reading and writing.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the current performance of the school, but have not addressed weaknesses in the teaching of reading and writing. As a result, formerly high levels of overall achievement by students in Years 7 to 11 have declined. In 2014, unexpectedly poor results in one element of the GCSE English examination led to much lower grades in the subject than senior leaders had anticipated. Weaknesses in the development of literacy skills throughout Years 7 to 11 were a key factor.
- Action taken since the recent appointment of new subject leadership in English has improved students' literacy skills in Years 7 and 8. However, too many in Years 9 to 11 are not yet making good progress in English. There remains too little emphasis in the curriculum on developing these students' reading and writing skills.
- The setting of homework is not checked with sufficient rigour. Students themselves comment on the varying demands of homework across subjects, and give English as an example of where it is not set regularly.
- Improvements have been made in other areas. Action taken since the previous inspection has rectified weaknesses identified at that time. The sixth form, then satisfactory, is now good. Because improvement has been given a high priority and action has been mostly effective, teaching has improved in a number of subjects, notably science. It has not, however, done so quickly enough in English or in reading and writing in some other subjects.
- Academy leaders have been successful in maintaining a good atmosphere in the academy. Students are well-behaved and, when taught well, display real enthusiasm for learning. The academy ensures good relationships between students and with adults. Students and parents express very few concerns about bullying.
- Senior leaders make accurate checks on the quality of teaching and have been successful in eliminating very weak teaching. Minor weaknesses are tackled through appropriate training, although some staff believe this is too limited in scope. Inspectors found that although training is reliant largely on local expertise, it is of good quality.
- Middle leadership is generally improving and, overall, is of good quality. Subject leadership of mathematics, science, geography and physical education are strengths. Leadership of the sixth form, and of provision for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs, are also very effective. For example, the leader has produced a useful comprehensive handbook that gives guidance to staff on meeting the needs of each student who is disabled or has special needs.
- Parents expressed strong support for the school, with nine in ten saying they would recommend it to others. No particular aspect emerges as a particular area of concern.
- Apart from the weaknesses in literacy and English, in most other respects the curriculum is strong, and meets students' needs. The shared teaching with other local secondary schools provides students with a good breadth of range for their sixth form subject choices.
- Students are prepared well for life in modern Britain. They understand the importance of tolerance and fairness. During the inspection, the imminent general election was a major topic in tutorials and assemblies. The Combined Cadet Force (CCF) reminds students of the importance of respect for those in the armed services.
- Additional funding is used well to ensure that the performance of disadvantaged students matches that of others. Gaps between the performance of these two groups are small and in the sixth form are non-existent. This shows leaders' commitment to equality of opportunity. The lack of bullying, for example, shows that school leaders do not tolerate discrimination.
- Arrangements to keep students safe meet requirements and are effective. All required checks are made on adults, and staff are well-trained concerning child protection.
- Students receive good quality advice and guidance for the next stage of their education. Many leave the sixth form for higher education. At the end of Year 11, those attracted to apprenticeships and college courses are helped to find the most suitable choice.
- The academy's use of the local authority and other external sources of expertise is somewhat patchy and informal. Academy leaders plan, rightly, to make better use of national networks that offer additional expertise on the improvement of schools.
- Leaders rigorously check students' progress, attendance and safety at alternative provision.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are well-informed and have a good range of skills. They understand the academy's performance in relation to others, although at times they are a little too ready to accept the analysis and explanations of academy leaders. They know about the overall quality of teaching and of how this relates to teachers' pay, and are keen to ensure that staff paid higher salaries take on appropriate responsibilities. Governors know how good teaching is rewarded and underperformance tackled.
- By challenging senior leaders, governors have successfully played their part in ensuring that weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been tackled. Their engagement has been instrumental in improving the sixth form and the teaching of science. They also ensure that additional funding is used well for its intended purpose.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. They are polite to adults and each other and look smart. They behave very well around the academy; for example a cake sale organised by students on behalf of victims of the Nepalese earthquake was held in a corridor. This was an orderly, popular event, well-managed by the students.
- In lessons, behaviour is also generally good. Only when students lack challenge, or fail to understand the work, does minor misbehaviour occur. Students say that this most often occurs when supply teachers with whom they are unfamiliar are teaching.
- However, as other staff agree, most teachers follow the academy's policy for behaviour. As a result, minor sanctions are commonly used but exclusion from academy is rare.
- Students say there is very little bullying, in fact they seemed surprised to be questioned on this. The academy's records confirm that bullying is infrequent. Students are aware of different forms such as homophobic bullying, but say that all students are tolerant of people with different lifestyles or backgrounds. This shows that academy leaders have been successful in tackling intolerance.
- Students' attendance has improved since the previous inspection and is above average. Students are punctual when arriving at the academy and to their lessons.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Staff are aware of the potential risks to young people and have effective arrangements to minimise those risks. For examples, arrangements for educational visits are checked carefully.
- Students have a good understanding of the dangers of the misuse of electronic media. They speak with confidence about using common sense when contacting people online. Wall posters and information leaflets concerning such risks are displayed prominently around the academy.
- Work by academy leaders to reduce persistent absence among students has been effective. Relevant staff have a good understanding of each case and can say what is being done to improve the student's attendance.
- All safety arrangements concerning the few students who attend alternative provision are checked carefully, as is the attendance of each student. The academy has good partnerships with those who provide these services.
- Occasionally in lessons, routine safety requirements are overlooked, such as the need to tie back long hair for tasks where there is a potential risk.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- There are shortcomings in the teaching of reading and writing in Years 9 to 11. Some students do not read widely for pleasure because they are not encouraged sufficiently to do so. Others lack the skills needed to write at length with accuracy and for a range of purposes. This is because weaknesses in their writing were not corrected at an earlier stage.
- The academy has a policy for improving students' literacy of which teachers are aware. Many place an appropriately strong emphasis on teaching students the specialist language of the subject but this is not always the case. For example in drama in Year 9 students' misunderstanding of dramatic terms was not clarified by the teacher. In some subjects there is sometimes too little emphasis on the encouragement of wide reading and writing around the subject.

- Academy leaders have recognised these shortcomings and have put improvements in place. As a result, achievement in reading and writing in Years 7 and 8 is improving. In particular, these students are now encouraged to read more widely.
- Teaching in many subjects is very effective. As a result, achievement over time in some areas remains high, as in mathematics, physical education, history, business education and media education. In others, including science, modern foreign languages, and geography, achievement is improving due to improved teaching.
- Mathematical skills are taught well. As a result, students are able to use skills of calculation effectively in a range of subjects including science, design and technology and business education.
- Weaknesses in teaching identified at the previous inspection, such as using checks on students' progress to plan further work and giving useful guidance to students on improving it, have been rectified. However, this does not always extend to resolving weaknesses in reading and writing in Years 9 to 11.
- Work is planned well for disadvantaged students, those who are disabled or have special educational needs, and for the most-able students. As a result, these groups of students achieve well. The internally-produced handbook is used well to help teachers plan suitable work. The skills of additional adults are used effectively to ensure that those who need extra help make good progress.
- The quality of feedback to students by teachers is a growing strength. Students value this feedback which they say helps them to improve their work.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In GCSE examinations taken by Year 11 students in 2014, attainment in English was below the national average, having been well above average in previous years. Less than half of these students had made good or better progress in English since Year 7, compared with seven in every 10 students nationally. However, students' continued to make good progress in other English GCSE examinations including English literature.
- Scrutiny of their work and the academy's checks on progress show improvements in standards of English among current students in Year 11. Nevertheless, the progress of these students remains less than good overall.
- Students' achievement in reading and writing, especially in Years 9 to 11, is patchy. While some read widely and write well, others do not. For example, students in Years 9 to 11 recall reading and enjoying books such as *'The Hunger Games'* in Year 7, but were able to show little in terms of reading for pleasure since then.
- For other students, earlier weaknesses have not been rectified, notably in writing. Examples seen in Years 8 and 10 involved a lack of joined-up handwriting and poor sentence structure. Such factors hold students back when tackling written work in all subjects.
- In most subjects, however, achievement in Years 7 to 11 is good. Mathematics and history are notable strengths where GCSE attainment has been well above average for several years. Achievement in science, geography and modern foreign languages is rising. Students achieve well in physical education, with many taking part in competitive sport, including at regional level. Students also understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle.
- Students use mathematics well in a range of subjects. For example in Year 10 physics, students were asked to find the value of v using the equation: $E_k = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$. This is a demanding task for students at this stage.
- The achievement of disadvantaged students when compared to others is improving. They make progress relative to their starting points that is similar to that of other students nationally in mathematics, although it is slower in English. In 2014 in both English and mathematics, they attained, on average, grades that were between half a grade and a whole grade lower than other students nationally. Within the academy, these gaps were slightly larger in mathematics and smaller in English. Over time these gaps are closing, albeit somewhat slowly.
- The achievement of the most-able students is improving, having been a cause for concern identified by academy leaders. In 2014, the proportion attaining the highest grades A* and A in GCSE was at or above national averages in most subjects including English, mathematics and science. Students' work shows that the achievement of these students continues to improve, notably in physics, chemistry, biology and modern foreign languages.
- Students who are disabled or who have special educational needs also achieve well because of the extra help they receive. In some cases these students make better overall progress than other students.
- Early entry for GCSE in mathematics has been used in the recent past. The policy is reviewed at regular

intervals and there is no evidence that it has limited the potential of the most-able students to achieve their best.

- The number of students attending alternative provision is too small to draw general conclusions concerning their achievement.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form is a strength of the academy. Due to effective leadership, considerable improvement has taken place in the provision since the previous inspection, when it was a relative weakness. This includes an improvement in attainment in English when compared with that found in Year 11.
- Students' progress on both A level and vocational courses is rising and is now good. As a result, their attainment in both types of course, from starting points that are below average, is also improving and is now average. Inconsistencies in the achievement of students following different courses are now much smaller than in the past. This includes achievement on those courses that are studied at other schools.
- Teaching of sixth form courses is good and also has improved since the previous inspection. Better teaching of literacy skills ensures that the proportion achieving the required standard in English is higher than in Year 11. Students read more widely than in Years 9 to 11, and specialist vocabulary is taught more precisely. The planning of work using checks on students' progress is also a strength.
- Disadvantaged students achieve as well as others. However, there is room for improvement in the proportion of the most-able students attaining the highest grades, A* and A, at A level.
- Students enjoy learning and set a good example for younger students. This is shown by the high proportion who continue their education into Year 13 and beyond. Few students fail in what they set out to achieve. Sixth form students play a full part in the life of the academy through charity collections and other activities involving all students.
- Sixth form provision is of a higher standard than that overall in the academy because the weaknesses in literacy have largely been resolved at this stage.
- The sixth form is well-led. Leaders have focused on improving shortcomings identified at the previous inspection. This has led to improving student achievement and a positive atmosphere around all aspects of sixth form life. Students are given good guidance for the next stage of their education.

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	136557
Local authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	461959

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
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	1256
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carl Atkinson
Principal	Andrew Birkett
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 May 2012
Telephone number	01752337193
Fax number	01752331460
Email address	heles.school@plymouth.gov.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 and 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

