



**Office for Standards
in Education**

Inspection report
Hodge Hill School

Birmingham Education Authority

Dates of inspection: 8 and 9 November 2004

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act

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Basic information about the school

Name of school:	Hodge Hill School
Type of school:	Secondary
Status:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Headteacher:	Ms M McMahon
Address of school:	Bromford Road Hodge Hill Birmingham West Midlands B36 8HB
Telephone:	0121 464 7500
Name and address of appropriate authority:	The governing body, address as above
Chair of governors:	Mr M Sparkes
Local education authority area:	Birmingham
Unique reference number:	103503
Name of reporting inspector:	Mr R Hubbleday HMI
Dates of inspection:	8 and 9 November 2004

Introduction

1. Hodge Hill School is situated in Hodge Hill, which is a largely residential area north east of the centre of Birmingham. The school is bigger than average, with 1137 pupils on roll. There are significantly more boys than girls, reflecting the greater availability of places in single-sex schools for girls, one of which is next to Hodge Hill. A special school for d/Deaf pupils has recently been built on the site and there are close links between the schools. Forty three per cent of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well above average. Around 60 per cent of the pupils are of white British origin; approximately half of the other pupils speak English as an additional language. A quarter of the pupils are identified as having special educational needs, which is above average. Twenty nine pupils have a formal Statement of Special Educational Need, which is a broadly average proportion. The school admits pupils from over 50 primary schools and attainment on entry varies widely, but is well below average overall.

2. The school was inspected in February 2003. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

3. The governors drew up an action plan to address the key issues from the inspection of February 2003. The school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) on three occasions to monitor the progress being made.

4. In November 2004, three HMI inspected the school, assessing the standard of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2003.

Main findings

5. In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils. The main findings of the inspection are:

- most pupils are beginning to make at least satisfactory progress and standards are rising, although attainment remains well below average. The end-of-Key Stage 3 tests in 2004 saw a marked improvement in the English results but a decline in science. At the end of Key Stage 4, the results in GCSE or equivalent examinations rose sharply. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A* to C improved from 18 per cent to 31 per cent;
- most pupils are making rapid gains in reading but many find it difficult to write with precision. In mathematics, the more-able pupils successfully tackle work which is beyond the level expected for their age but too many other pupils lack confidence in carrying out basic computation. Standards in science remain low and the pupils do not always conduct their investigations with sufficient accuracy and attention to detail. Their background knowledge is often poor;

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- the pupils' attitudes and behaviour are broadly satisfactory and have improved considerably since the school was judged to require special measures. However, in too many lessons, a minority of the pupils talked out of turn, did not listen to their teachers and showed a general disregard for authority;
 - there has been a significant improvement in the school's attendance figures although they remain below average. A wide range of well co-ordinated strategies has raised attendance from 82.4 per cent in 2002 to 88.7 per cent in 2004. In the current term, attendance exceeds 90 per cent. Nevertheless, too many pupils continue to arrive late to their lessons during the day despite the exhortations of teachers they meet en route;
 - the school's provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. The close working relationship between the religious education and citizenship departments is a particular strength. The school makes good provision for the religious beliefs of its pupils; for example, a prayer room is set aside for the use of Muslim pupils. Moral and social responsibilities are emphasised well; for instance, by encouraging the pupils to raise money for charities and a ward of a local hospital. There is a very wide range of extracurricular activities, including clubs for sport, music, art and drama;
 - there has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the inspection of February 2003, and it is broadly satisfactory, although it is better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. The significant reduction in the number of temporary staff has helped to secure greater consistency and commitment to the school's policies;
 - most of the teaching was satisfactory or better and two fifths was good or very good. In many of the lessons which were no more than satisfactory, there were few opportunities for the pupils to develop a real understanding of what they were learning through practical activity and discussion. In addition, the teaching was unsatisfactory in a few lessons where the teachers rarely gained the full attention of all of the pupils;
 - the school has worked hard to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of all its pupils and there is now a much better balance between academic and vocational programmes. All pupils in Year 10 take at least one vocational option. The school is making good use of the business community to run workshops which consider the skills that are needed if pupils are to gain employment;
 - many features of the procedures for assessment are good. The school has collected valuable data on the pupils' attainment and uses it well to check progress and to intervene where necessary. However, marking is too variable in quality;
 - the headteacher provides dynamic and effective leadership. She has directed the school's work with strong self-belief and confidence in the ability of her staff. Unsatisfactory performance has been identified rigorously and
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challenged appropriately. At the same time, professional development and support have been extensive and well focused. Strategic planning is rigorous and based on an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses;

- the senior team of deputies and assistant headteachers makes a significant contribution to the school's work and has been a powerful force in securing stability and calm when it was most required. As well as implementing suitable procedures for holding middle managers to account the team members have a high profile around the school and lead by example in their own teaching and relationships with the pupils;
- the quality of subject leadership has improved considerably and is good in many instances. Heads of department understand the importance of monitoring the quality of teaching, written work and planning and are becoming used to analysing standards to identify where further improvements are required;
- the governors support the school effectively and have grown in their understanding of their role. The support of the local education authority (LEA) has been good.

Key issues

6. In order to improve the pupils' quality of education further, the governors, headteacher, senior managers and staff need to:

- continue to raise standards;
- improve the pupils' attitudes to school, including their attendance and punctuality;
- increase the proportion of good teaching and continue to tackle unsatisfactory teaching.

Inspection findings

Standards achieved by the pupils

7. Standards have risen since the last inspection although attainment at the end of both key stages remains well below average. From a low base of attainment on entry to the school, most pupils are beginning to make at least satisfactory progress. However, rates of progress vary between different subjects, key stages and groups of pupils. The progress of the more-able pupils, for example, is often good but pupils of lower attainment sometimes struggle to make satisfactory progress.

8. Results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have been well below the national figures in recent years but in 2004 there was a marked improvement in English and a rise in mathematics. The results in science, however, declined. At the end of Key Stage 4, the results in GCSE or equivalent examinations, which historically have been very low, rose

sharply in 2004. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A* to C improved from 18 per cent in 2003 to 31 per cent. The proportions achieving five or more, or one or more, A* to G grades also improved. However, there were wide variations between ethnic groups: similar numbers of pupils of Pakistani and African heritage were entered for examinations but only 13 per cent of the Pakistani heritage pupils achieved five or more good passes while the corresponding figure for the African heritage pupils was 44 per cent. The figure for the much larger group of white pupils was 35 per cent, but this group's success rate for achieving five passes at grades A* to G fell well behind all the other groups.

9. Although standards in English are well below average, they are rising strongly. At the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of the pupils achieving the expected Level 5 or above rose to 48 per cent, from 34 per cent in 2003. Many of the pupils enter the school with poor levels of literacy and speaking and listening skills but most are making rapid gains in reading through a very effective accelerated learning programme. However, throughout the school, many pupils find it difficult to write with precision. In Year 7, for example, the pupils wrote poetry using similes and personification but were unable to improve their first drafts by selecting more effective vocabulary. In contrast, the standards attained by a group of able pupils in Year 9 were in line with those expected for their age. They produced sustained written work which demonstrated a considered understanding of a range of techniques to persuade the reader. The marked improvement in test results at Key Stage 3 has been mirrored at Key Stage 4. The proportion of pupils achieving a pass at Grade C or above rose from 21 per cent to 36 per cent in English language and from 7 per cent to 41 per cent in English literature.

10. Standards in mathematics remain well below average but are improving. In the 2004 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected Level 5 rose from 46 per cent in 2003 to 50 per cent. Nearly a quarter of the pupils reached the higher Level 6 or better and more pupils made satisfactory or better progress from their starting points in Year 7, reflecting improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. However, while the more-able pupils successfully tackle work which is beyond the level expected for their age, too many pupils of average or lower ability lack confidence in carrying out basic computation. They were often unable to identify suitable strategies to solve straightforward problems, such as, in Year 9, calculating rises in salary expressed as percentages. At the end of Key Stage 4, the GCSE results have improved although they remain low. Seventeen per cent of the pupils gained a pass at Grade C or higher, compared to ten per cent in 2003.

11. Standards in science remain low and the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 5 at the end of Key Stage 3 fell to 34 per cent in 2004. There is an appropriate focus on learning through practical experiences, but the pupils do not always conduct their investigations with sufficient accuracy and attention to detail. They lack a secure understanding of the importance of identifying constants and variables when constructing a fair test and their background knowledge is often poor; for example, several pupils in Year 7 thought that the force exerted by a 100 gram weight was dependent on the shape of the weight. Too many pupils are unable to use appropriate scientific vocabulary when talking about their work. However, there have been improvements in the standards achieved at Key Stage 4. The proportion of pupils gaining a pass at Grade C or above rose from 17 per cent in 2003 to 32 per cent in 2004. Nevertheless, the attainment of less-able Year 11 pupils is poor for their age because of a legacy of underachievement.

The pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are broadly satisfactory and have improved considerably since the school was judged to require special measures. The quality of the pupils' responses closely matched variations in the effectiveness of the teaching. When lessons captured the pupils' imagination and required their full involvement, they settled quickly and quietly to completing tasks. They related well to their teachers and their fellow pupils, listened attentively and were confident to express their ideas. However, in too many lessons a minority of the pupils talked out of turn, did not listen to their teachers and showed a general disregard for authority.

13. The school has begun to create an environment where all feel valued and secure and success is celebrated. A sound behaviour policy has led to a more consistent approach to discipline. In most classes, the teachers suitably balanced the use of rewards and sanctions to create a positive and productive ethos. There are good arrangements for supporting the pupils who find it hard to cope with everyday classroom life, whether their difficulties arise from controlling their behaviour, learning English as a second language or coping with poor learning skills. The integration unit has played an important role in reducing the number of fixed-term exclusions which, although still too high at 198 in the academic year 2003-2004, fell from 285 in the previous year and has continued to fall at the beginning of the current academic year.

14. There has been a significant improvement in the school's attendance figures over the past two years although they remain below average. A wide range of well co-ordinated strategies has raised attendance from 82.4 per cent in 2002 to 88.7 per cent in 2004. This improving trend has continued and in the current term, attendance exceeds 90 per cent. There has been a good reduction in unauthorised absence although it remains too high at 5.4 per cent. The procedures for monitoring absence are good and the attendance officer has played a major role in securing the improvements. His work has also ensured that more pupils arrive at school on time. Nevertheless, too many pupils continue to arrive late to their lessons during the day despite the exhortations of teachers they meet en route.

15. The school's provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. The close working relationship between the religious education and citizenship departments is a particular strength. In citizenship lessons the pupils consider the choices they will need to make if they are to be successful members of society; the moral and religious issues underpinning their decisions are discussed in religious education lessons. The school appropriately places a high emphasis on helping the pupils to articulate their beliefs and understand those of others. It also encourages all pupils to consider how personal beliefs, where appropriate, might be translated into positive actions for the good of the community.

16. There is a suitable pattern of assemblies providing for collective worship and the celebration of achievement. Some time is set aside for personal reflection within assemblies but there are insufficient opportunities in most lessons for the pupils to develop a personal response to the subject matter. Discussion, except in a few subjects such as English and religious education, is often perfunctory. The school makes good provision for the religious beliefs of its pupils; for example, a prayer room is set aside for the use of Muslim pupils. Moral and social responsibilities are emphasised well; for instance, by encouraging the pupils to raise money for charities and a ward of a local hospital. The pupils are also given

opportunities to contribute to the smooth running of their school through acting as representatives on the school council, taking on the role of peer mentors or supporting younger pupils. However, while the school's expectations about social responsibility are satisfactory, there remain small numbers of pupils who do not give sufficient consideration to the impact which their inappropriate behaviour has on their peers.

17. There is a very wide range of extracurricular activities, including clubs for sport, music, art and drama. The pupils also take part in residential visits, such as history expeditions to Holland and language visits to France. In their different ways, the school's breakfast club and the end-of-year prom play an important part in the pupils' positive experience of school. A working party for equal opportunities ensures that cultural issues are overtly addressed and a range of cultural traditions is reflected in clubs such as salsa dancing and the school band. The opportunities that the pupils have to visit productions in Stratford and London introduce them to English theatrical traditions.

The quality of education

18. The quality of teaching is broadly satisfactory but differed between the key stages, with more good teaching and less that was unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. Overall, it was satisfactory or better in 28 lessons, including 13 in which it was good or very good. It was unsatisfactory or poor in five.

19. There has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the inspection of February 2003. The significant reduction in the number of temporary staff has helped to secure greater consistency and commitment to the school's policies. In particular, the teachers' expectations about the pupils' behaviour are considerably higher and they teach with greater confidence in their ability to deal with unnecessary interruptions. The more regular provision of effective teaching has, in turn, fostered higher expectations from the pupils about what they want to gain from lessons. On several occasions, they were keen to tell the inspectors that they appreciated the improvements which had occurred.

20. In the best lessons, the teachers ensured that all of the pupils participated productively. The crisp beginnings of lessons set the tone for what was to follow. The teachers gave lively explanations of new work and regularly checked whether everyone was keeping up. Humour was employed to retain the pupils' interest and promote understanding. Questioning was sharp and accurate answers were demanded but this rigour was balanced by mutual respect between teachers and pupils. The pace of these lessons was not allowed to drop and the pupils were never in any doubt about the importance of every minute. In contrast, in lessons where the teaching was unsatisfactory, the teachers rarely gained the full attention of all of the pupils and their lessons proceeded slowly, which placed further demands on the pupils' low levels of enthusiasm.

21. Most of the teaching was satisfactory and was built soundly on lesson plans which identified relevant learning objectives, mapped out suitable structures and outlined how activities would be adapted to cater for pupils at different stages of understanding. In many of these lessons, the quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory rather than good because there were few opportunities for the pupils to develop a real understanding of what they were learning through practical activity and discussion.

22. The school has worked hard to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of all its pupils and there is now a much better balance between academic and vocational programmes.

Beginning this academic year, all pupils in Year 10 take at least one vocational option. Good use has been made of the funding provided by the Learning and Skills Council and the school is working closely with partner institutions to provide an appropriate range of opportunities through the modern apprenticeship scheme. The innovative introduction of an enterprise plan to support the transition programme from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 has been well thought out. It emphasises cross-curricular links and encourages investigative and research skills. The school is making good use of the business community to run workshops which consider the skills that are needed if pupils are to gain employment.

23. Many features of the procedures for assessment are good. The school has collected valuable data on the pupils' attainment and uses it well to check progress and to intervene where necessary. Information from tests, examinations and the teachers' assessments has been collated and forms the basis of realistic but ambitious targets for improvement. The pupils are given a grade to aim for and their teachers monitor and evaluate progress. The system is evolving and further development is planned to consolidate good practice and ensure consistency across year groups and subjects. Marking is too variable and the school is implementing a new policy which clarifies expectations about the need for all pupils to receive regular feedback about their performance. The best marking helpfully sets specific targets for the pupils to improve their work. However, sometimes marking is not so well focused and opportunities to help the pupils are missed.

Leadership and management

24. The headteacher provides dynamic and effective leadership. She has consistently articulated a vision for the school's future based on an ambitious set of expectations about what is possible. She has directed the school's work with strong self-belief and confidence in the ability of her staff to overcome challenging circumstances. The focus on improvement has been necessarily relentless. Unsatisfactory performance has been identified rigorously and challenged appropriately. At the same time, professional development and support have been extensive and well focused. Recruitment difficulties, which at one stage threatened to overwhelm the school, have been largely overcome and the headteacher has successfully gathered a strong team of committed staff. Strategic planning is rigorous and based on an accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The improvement plan for the coming year provides a good basis for building on the progress that has been made.

25. The senior team of deputies and assistant headteachers makes a significant contribution to the school's work. Areas of responsibility have been delegated appropriately and roles are clearly defined. The senior team has been a powerful force in securing stability and calm when it was most required. As well as implementing suitable procedures for holding middle managers to account the team members have a high profile around the school and lead by example in their own teaching and relationships with the pupils. The quality of subject leadership has improved considerably and is good in many instances. Heads of department understand the importance of monitoring the quality of teaching, written work and planning and are becoming used to analysing standards to identify where further improvements are required. There are effective procedures to support weaker departments and the school has been creative in its use of partnerships with other schools and with the LEA to strengthen subject leadership. The school has increasingly demonstrated its capacity to improve and is well placed to move forward.

26. The governors support the school effectively and have grown in their understanding of their role. They are committed to the school's improvement and have suitably held the headteacher accountable for meeting targets in the action plan.

27. The LEA's support has been good. The link adviser knows the school well and has effectively co-ordinated a range of advisory work. Help with resolving staffing issues has enabled the school to strengthen its teaching and leadership profile. The LEA has, at appropriate intervals, conducted rigorous reviews of progress which have accurately identified areas for further action.

Implementation of the action plan

28. The inspection report of February 2003 required the school to address five key issues. These related to raising standards of attainment, improving the quality of teaching and learning, improving behaviour and attendance, and strengthening the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation. Overall, the school has made reasonable progress.

29. Standards of attainment have risen, particularly in English. However, there is considerably more work to be done in some subjects to match the performance of the best departments. The quality of teaching and learning has improved steadily through a concerted focus on professional development and clarity about the elements of good provision. There is still too much teaching that is not up to the mark but the school has shown it is capable of remedying weak teaching.

30. Although the behaviour and attitudes of a minority of pupils continue to cause concern, the school has successfully tackled the extreme misbehaviour which was common when the school was inspected in 2003. The ethos of the school is much improved and there are effective procedures for dealing with issues. Attendance has risen significantly.

31. The school has implemented a comprehensive programme of monitoring and evaluation. Observations of teaching have resulted in an accurate appraisal of the teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and have been followed up by appropriate action. The development of thorough systems to collect data has supported increasingly sophisticated analysis of the school's effectiveness. The school knows itself and is able to gauge its progress.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected by HMI in February 2003. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI in September 2003 and February and May 2004 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of February 2003.

In November 2004, three HMI returned to inspect the school for two days. Thirty three lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and five registration sessions were inspected. The pupils were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, the vice-chair of governors and a representative of the LEA. Informal discussions were held with other staff and pupils. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of February 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.