



The Howard School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 118929
LEA Medway

Inspection number 274790
Inspection dates 26-27 April 2005
Reporting inspector Marjorie Glynne-Jones

Inspection deemed to have been carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 according to section 12(3) of the same act.

Type of School	Other secondary	School address	Derwent Way
School category	Foundation		Rainham
Age range of pupils	11-18		Gillingham
			Kent ME8 0BX
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	01634 388765
Number on roll	1470	Fax number	01634 388558
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Carole Eatwell
Date of previous inspection	December 2002	Headteacher	Mr David Smith

Age group	Published	Reference no.
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Introduction

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of the staff of The Howard School and of the local education authority.

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is in Medway, which has a selective system of entry to secondary modern and grammar schools at age 11. The Howard has a combined (bilateral) entry: the vast majority of the pupils do not qualify for a grammar school place; about four per cent do. On entry pupils' attainment is about average. The school is much bigger than most secondary schools, with an average-sized sixth form, operating in a consortium with two neighbouring schools. About a quarter of its pupils have special educational needs, more than in most schools. Pupils come from areas with lower levels of financial difficulty than most, but with fewer families who have benefited from higher education. Slightly more pupils than usual have a home language that is not English. The school supports a small number of pupils at an early stage of English fluency and also a small number of vulnerable pupils.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

The school's evaluation that its effectiveness is satisfactory is confirmed by the inspection evidence. This school no longer has serious weaknesses.

Pupils have positive views of the school and show some pride in it. They are confident that their viewpoints are valued and respected. Their parents are equally positive. Overall, standards are average although they are below in the sixth form. At all stages progress is satisfactory and standards are rising. This is true in all subjects and courses except for science and geography where standards have not yet improved sufficiently. While pupils' literacy is well developed through their work in English, this is not consistently achieved across other subjects. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory, a consequence of effective teaching and care for individuals' well-being. The relationship with partner primary schools leads to a smooth transition into Year 7. Links with external agencies for the support of young people are strong.

The school is led with vision and determination. It is well placed to improve further, having made significant improvements in almost all the areas identified as weaknesses at the last inspection. The lack of a school library remains a weakness, although a small Year 7 library has been created, and the very limited resources prevent its development. A deficit budget, which has restricted spending on resources, will be cleared by 2006. The school's commitment to the success of all individuals is reflected by the fact that almost all gain a qualification. Value for money is satisfactory.

Grade: 3

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Inspection evidence confirms the school's evaluation that the sixth form is satisfactory, and has some good features. Standards are below average, but are improving well, and progress is satisfactory. Student numbers are increasing and most students complete their studies at the end of Year 13. Sixth-formers show maturity and independence and are a good advertisement for the school. They hold it in good regard. They benefit from effective teaching and the very successful partnerships in the consortium, through which they have access to a wide range of courses. Advice and guidance is good. Good leadership and management are developing the quality of provision and making sure that it works effectively.

Grade: 3

What the school should do to improve further

Continue to raise standards and achievement by:

- ensuring a consistent approach to raising standards in literacy across all subjects drawing on the English department's strengths
- strengthening the quality of teaching to achieve a good standard across the school
- strengthening the leadership and management in science and geography
- making adequate provision for a school library and resources centre to support pupils' literacy and study skills.

Achievement and standards

Overall, standards are average and improving well. The school sets pupils challenging targets. Results are rising faster than they are nationally and have improved significantly since the last inspection.

Pupils join Year 7 with broadly average standards. They make satisfactory progress by Year 9. In English, progress is particularly good, but in science it is not good enough. Senior managers are taking effective action in science to put this right. In mathematics progress is satisfactory.

By the end of Year 11 almost all pupils gain at least one GCSE grade, and a high proportion of pupils gain five or more GCSE grades including English and mathematics. These results show how well the school helps all learners to succeed. Pupils' results are significantly better in information and communication technology (ICT) and mathematics than in other subjects, but not as good in science. Geography results were among the least successful in 2004. Results in sports studies fell in 2004. This was the first time the whole year group took the examination, and not just a small group who had chosen it as an option. The school is confident that this was a temporary dip. The school's data show that effective action is being taken to improve results in French. However, the data are not being used to show how well different groups of pupils are doing across the school, such as those with special needs or those learning to speak English, or whether any group is underachieving.

Standards in the sixth form are below average, but a good improvement is predicted in 2005. Results in A level art and advanced vocational courses in information technology and business were strong in 2004.

Grade: 3

Personal development and well-being

The school's evaluation of pupils' personal development as satisfactory is supported by inspection evidence. Significant improvement has been achieved since the last inspection. Pupils' relationships with one another and with staff are good and they enjoy school. Relationships in the sixth form are a particular strength. Overall attendance is as good as it is nationally. The number of exclusions has fallen but is still too high. Through setting firm boundaries and applying them consistently the school ensures that in lessons and around the school most pupils behave responsibly. A small minority of pupils create low-level disruption in lessons. While this impedes the learning of those responsible, it is not allowed to interfere with the learning of others. Effective action is being taken to bring about improvement.

In the wide range of sports activities pupils are good team players and are helped to adopt a healthy life-style through participating; this is a strength. Pupils' cultural development is broadened by stimulating visits to different French-speaking countries, and from good opportunities in drama to explore different cultural traditions. Participation in activities such as the school council, the peer-mentoring scheme, and coaching younger pupils from the community in table tennis, encourages pupils' sense of social responsibility. There is room for strengthening their spiritual development, for example, through drawing on the opportunities provided in English, and their understanding of the world of work and finance.

Grade: 3

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Significant improvement since the last inspection has resulted in rising standards at each stage. Teachers know the pupils well and create a positive atmosphere to support confident learning. Information on progress is provided each term for learners, their parents and their teachers. Learners generally receive helpful comments on their work, showing how and what improvement is needed. Consequently most are quite clear about how well they are doing. The school has a robust system to check on marking which is making sure that consistent quality is well on the way to being established across the school. The school liaises with its primary partners to identify the Year 7 pupils who will need specialist support. In Years 7-8 this is provided effectively by withdrawing pupils from lessons, and from Year 9 onwards, supporting them in class, so that very few pupils leave school with no qualifications.

All teaching is now provided by subject specialists, one of the reasons for the improvement in quality. Teachers use guidance in the national programme for Years 7-9 effectively. The school has made some very good appointments, and some outstanding teaching was seen. In the best lessons, well-structured and stimulating tasks challenge pupils to raise their game. The school's mentoring system is particularly effective in helping teachers to sharpen their practice. There are some weaknesses; individual learning targets are generally not sharp enough for pupils to make the best progress. Planning for subject lessons is not always sufficiently adapted for different learning needs. Where this happens, pupils are not challenged to achieve their very best.

In the sixth form the teaching successfully enables students to think deeply and work independently. Assessment is thorough, with helpful comments about how students can improve their work.

Grade: 3

Curriculum and other activities

Since the last inspection the curriculum has been improved to cater for different groups of pupils. There are opportunities for taking GCSEs before Year 11, following an alternative work-related curriculum in Years 10-11 and attending additional before-school enrichment studies in Year 9. Plans for broadening work-related opportunities for all students in Years 10-11 are well underway. However, across the school, the work-related dimension is insufficiently developed in terms of young people's understanding of business.

The curriculum meets external requirements, although students' experience is restricted in design and technology by the lack of provision for computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). There is a good range of enrichment activities with strengths in sports, developing provision in music, course-work catch-up in subjects such as design and technology and French, and a drama society.

Curriculum provision in the sixth form is good. The wide range of courses offered through the consortium meets sixth-formers' interests and aspirations very well. A new free-choice timetable for September 2005 is enabling virtually all to follow their course choices.

Inspection evidence confirms the school's evaluation of the sixth-form curriculum as good, but indicates that the main-school curriculum is satisfactory rather than good, with good features.

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support

On an individual basis, particularly good support is provided by a full-time counsellor and peer mentors. Pupils are supported well through the school's good links with outside agencies, although younger pupils would like the school nurse to be in all day. The care provided through the personal, social and health education programme (PSHE), however, is not planned progressively, and does not include drugs awareness education until Year 10. This is too late to help young people to take responsibility for their own personal safety on an informed basis. Child protection arrangements are effective and termly training for all staff keeps them up to date with requirements. There is satisfactory careers guidance from Year 7 through weekly tutor group sessions, backed up by a schedule for year-groups to use the careers library. A range of activities, such as the school's participation in the Medway Education Business Partnership pilot, supports pupils' applications and interviews for jobs or further study.

The school involves parents and pupils well in evaluating its work through questionnaires, the school council, well-attended parents' evenings and the web-site, which has a high hit-rate. Specialist expertise and knowledge of individual pupils are shared through good liaison and regular multi-agency review meetings with school staff, so that young people receive good support. There is good care, guidance and support for sixth-formers through individual tutorials. Students know their target grades and what they have to do to improve. They appreciate the teachers who keep on at them to do the work. Through 'special days' such as the health day they are supported over personal issues, although as in the main school, the PSHE curriculum is merely a collection of activities and does little to promote the economic understanding they will need after leaving school.

Grade: 3

Leadership and management

The Principal's vision and determination have turned the school round since the last inspection so that achievement, behaviour, teaching and learning are now satisfactory. Clear priorities for improvement are backed up by efficient management procedures that work effectively. Weaknesses in teaching and vacancies in staffing have been very successfully resolved and recent appointments are of high quality. As a consequence, staff morale is high. There are clear and demanding expectations of senior and middle managers who are building consistently effective practice across the school. They are achieving this through using the procedures rigorously and systematically, such

as those for planning lessons and making sure that behaviour is good. Staff managers know how well things are going through regular checks, for example by observing lessons and looking at pupils' work. They use the findings to set targets for further improvement, for example for the regularity and quality of marking. Helpful data on pupils' progress are generally used well by all staff to promote achievement, but are not used to check that all groups of pupils, such as those who are vulnerable or who have gifts and talents, are doing as well as they should. Staff are well supported by excellent arrangements for newly qualified teachers and good development opportunities for experienced staff, such as peer observations. Strong subject management, for example in English, modern foreign languages and religious education, is raising standards. In science and geography the drive for improvement in teaching lacks rigour so that standards are not rising fast enough.

The sixth form is led and managed well. There is rigorous monitoring of the progress of individual students, with timely intervention where it is not good enough. Individual needs, opportunities and achievement are given priority. The success of this is shown in the consortium arrangements from autumn 2005.

The governors have tightened their procedures considerably since the last inspection. To ensure that each governor is up-to-speed and fully involved, the whole governing body is dealing with all areas of its responsibility as a group. Their close eye on what is happening is much helped by the chair's day in school each week. She has good knowledge of school strengths and weaknesses, although the papers for governors do not include the findings of school monitoring, for example from looking at work. Statutory requirements are not met for collective worship. Spending on resources is restricted, but sharply targeted, for example on staff appointments and provision for ICT. The size of classrooms, from too small to extremely large, prevents equal access to group activities and independent learning in all lessons. There is still no school library resources centre. Under financially challenging circumstances, the school achieves satisfactory value for money.

Grade: 2

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INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key to judgements: Grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16-19
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OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	* 3	* 3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	*	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Y	Y
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Y	Y

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

How well do learners achieve?	* 3	3
The <i>standards</i> reached by learners	3	4
How well learners' make <i>progress</i> , taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	* 3	
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	* 3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	* 3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	* 3	2
How well does the provision promote the well-being of learners?	* 3	3

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	* 2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Y	Y

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	Yes/No/NA
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are taught about sexual health risks	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	Yes/No/NA
Procedures for Child Protection meet the requirements of <i>Working Together to Safeguard Children</i>	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
How well learners enjoy and achieve	Yes/No/NA
Support is given to learners with poor behaviour and attendance	Yes
Learners' personal and academic development are monitored	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	Yes/No/NA
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, are consulted when key decisions affecting them have to be made and their views are listened to	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	Yes/No/NA
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop their enterprise and financial skills, and work in teams	No
Education and training for all learners in 14-19 is co-ordinated to give experience of work based learning	Yes

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The School Council
The Howard School
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April 28 2005

Dear Pupils and Sixth-formers

At the end of our visit to your school we were very pleased to tell Mr Smith, your Principal, that it does not have serious weaknesses any longer. All the people we spoke to, pupils, staff and the chair of governors, helped us to make this judgement.

We learned that there have been improvements by everyone. Lessons usually run smoothly now; they are mostly interesting and most of you enjoy them. Most of you do your best, but there are some people in the main school who don't yet. Your teachers are now all subject specialists and you said you were glad that you have the same teacher for the year. We were impressed by how well most of you know your grades and have a good idea about how well you are doing. All these things are obviously making a difference because your examination results are getting better. There are some subjects though, where things need to be managed better across the school, particularly science and geography. We think all the teaching should be equally interesting and always planned for people's different strengths.

We are concerned that the school does not have a library and we think that your literacy skills need to be worked on more in every subject, not just in English where they are worked on well. Some things could move faster, for instance, making sure that all of you take part in activities connected with managing work and money.

It's good that more of you are going to stay on in the sixth form next year and that you think people get on well at Howard whatever their background. We were impressed by the consortium and the wide range of courses you can choose from. The fact that you get on so well with the staff is helping to raise standards at the top of the school.

We think Mr Smith is doing a really good job.

With best wishes for your success

Yours sincerely

Marjorie Glynne-Jones
Lead inspector