



Howden Clough Girls' High School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 107770
LEA Kirklees
Inspection number 277839
Inspection dates 21 September 2005 to 22 September 2005
Reporting inspector Dr Linden Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Windmill Lane
School category	Community		Batley
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		West Yorkshire WF17 0LD
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01924 326352
Number on roll	1129	Fax number	01924 326267
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr J Townend
Date of previous inspection	8 November 1999	Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Eames

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	21 September 2005 - 22 September 2005	277839

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Description of the school

The all-girls school has recently gained Specialist Arts status, and has changed its name to signal a new start, as well as affirming links with the local boys' school.

There are around 1,150 pupils on roll, including 200 in the sixth form. Pupils are drawn from the Kirklees area and from wards with high social and economic deprivation. The school welcomes girls from white British, Indian and Pakistani heritage communities in roughly similar proportions. The proportion of pupils whose first language is other than English is high at around two thirds. Approximately a third of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Batley Girls' Visual Arts School is an improving school with many good and some outstanding features. Although achievement is improving, and in some areas it is very good, there is still work to do to improve standards overall for many and for some groups in particular. However, after evaluation, the school is addressing these matters with energy and intelligence. The recent Specialist Arts status is a catalyst for innovation not only within the school but also for enrichment in the girls' community. The headteacher knows her school and her staff well and empowers them to excel. She has put in place a new management team and coherent, well understood systems to improve attainment, under the overarching guidance of ART: 'Achievement, Respect, Transformation'. Because of the need to ensure a supportive community for its three ethnic groups, the school made a deliberate decision to concentrate its vision firstly for improvement on 'Respect' and this has worked effectively.

The school provides a secure environment where girls work and socialise in harmony. Girls enjoy being at school and have a strong sense of how their teachers are helping them learn. Parents have confidence in the school's ability to help their daughters succeed.

The school is well resourced and offers good value for money. Funding is allocated by an equitable formula, which is well understood. Governors hold the school to account well.

As yet, the considerable focus on raising attainment has not had time to work through and make its full impact on attainment across the whole of the school. However, the school is well placed now to make that vision of 'transformation for all' a reality.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is well led and managed efficiently by a newly constituted management team drawn from the senior leadership. It is cost effective. Numbers on roll have increased by one third in the past three years. A good curriculum offers a wide range of academic and vocational courses, which meet the ambitions and aspirations of all students well. The quality of care that students receive is outstanding. Students enter the sixth form with levels of attainment well below the national average. They achieve well due to the good quality of teaching they receive, the broad curriculum, and their own good attitudes to learning. Attendance is good, and most students complete the courses they start. Two thirds of students leaving Year 13 move on to higher education.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise attainment so that it is consistently good across all subjects and for all groups of pupils.
- To achieve this, permeate effective teaching practice throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

For many pupils, attainment on entry to Year 7 is low and so across the school standards are below the national average. For most pupils, achievement in Years 7 to 11 is satisfactory overall, although for some groups and individuals attainment is low in comparison with schools in a similar context. Achievement in the sixth form, however, is good.

There are significant pockets of success. The school has a thorough system of setting pupils challenging targets and in some subjects this has resulted in very good outcomes. Pupils' general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results in 2004 were outstanding in art and design. Students in the sixth form generally achieve well. Pupils whose first language is not English achieve well in the subject and those with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress. The school has successfully met its attainment targets. Mathematics and science results, although remaining below national averages, are showing some improvement. Success, however, has yet to be seen consistently across all subjects. The percentage of students who get five or more higher GCSE grades is below the national average. However, the proportion gaining at least one GCSE or more has shown steady improvement and is now broadly in line with the national picture. The school monitors results carefully and takes appropriate action to address weaknesses such as the significant underachievement of disaffected white British girls. There are clear indications these are beginning to take effect, however, it is too early to judge the full impact in relation to the outcomes for all pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The effect of the school's efforts to provide a tranquil, friendly atmosphere is outstanding. Relationships between pupils and adults are very good; pupils behave well and patently enjoy their learning. The school provides many well-considered opportunities for students to celebrate the diversity of their community. An annual 'East Meets West' festival is organised with local community groups and is very popular. Tutorials and assemblies offer themes for reflection on contemporary world issues linked to personal belief. Pupils often contribute and listen respectfully to the ideas of others. Through the personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) curriculum and Healthy School initiatives, pupils are encouraged to adopt more healthy lifestyles. The catering manager liaises with the school nurse to provide specific diets for a number of pupils.

Dedicated social areas for each year group provide attractive, safe havens. Pupils enjoy organising fundraising and social events which draw the whole of the community together as in the recent Tsunami appeal or fund raising for a child facing serious illness.

The democratically elected school council plays a key part in decision making. As part of the Eco School programme, pupils are enthusiastic in taking responsibility for their own environment. 'OASIS' is a highly successful initiative, which engages disaffected pupils through an alternative curriculum relevant to their needs. Well-equipped sports facilities provide a wide range of opportunities for competitive and recreational activities.

Whilst attendance is currently unsatisfactory, the school works unstintingly to improve it. Data on attendance are used to target specific problems. Coordinating approaches to families with the linked boys' school, the new pastoral system focuses on rounded support, which aims to remove barriers to learning.

Security arrangements in the school are impressive: a security officer ensures the school grounds are safe and also works and talks with local residents. The school provides a late bus for those participating in after school clubs and activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Overall, teaching is good and pupils generally make good progress in lessons. Pupils across all year groups praise the way that staff help them learn and support them through difficulties.

The Arts College Status is beginning to have a positive impact on improving teaching and learning. In the best lessons, pupils learn very effectively from the wide range of creative and challenging activities, where they are encouraged to interact and learn from each other. Art and English lessons use these techniques to excellent effect, fully engaging pupils of all ability. In language lessons, girls were encouraged to speak with expression and gain great fun from their learning.

Teaching is regularly monitored and the school has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of its staff. To improve the quality of lessons, the school has taken a collaborative approach to detailed peer observation, self-reflection and sharing good practice with a clear focus on outcomes for learners. However, the impact of these initiatives is inconsistent. In a minority of lessons, learning is less effective: lessons are too teacher-led; girls are not always given the guidance they need to improve and the learning skills of some higher ability girls are underdeveloped.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

All the statutory requirements are met throughout the school. In the main school, the curriculum has breadth and balance, meeting the needs of all groups of pupils in an increasingly innovative way. The curriculum is enhanced by the school's specialist status, and by a very well planned focus on enterprise education. At the start of Year 10, pupils choose from a range of traditional academic subjects, vocational subjects

and, where necessary, from an alternative curriculum, which best meets their needs. The school regularly checks that learning in these subjects is effective. The school recognises that the potential for using information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning across the curriculum has yet to be fully exploited. Curriculum opportunities for students in the sixth form are equally good, though a continuous pathway for some vocational subjects has yet to be fully developed. Pupils have many opportunities to enhance their learning through a good range of extra curricular sporting and cultural activities. The quality, range and take up of these activities in the sixth form, are exceptional.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's ethos of care and support for its girls is apparent in the pupils' relations with each other and with staff. Girls arriving in Year 7 receive an excellent induction programme, which helps them to settle into their new school. A new pastoral system focuses clearly on removing barriers to learning and supporting those who would benefit from additional help. A well understood approach to counter bullying: peer mentoring and a buddy scheme, ensure that all feel safe and thoroughly enjoy their time in school.

Pupils' progress is monitored well in many subjects through a 'traffic light system' used to track pupils' attendance, behaviour and achievement with appropriate intervention. Careers guidance is good; all pupils receive opportunities for work experience.

Child protection is very well managed with informative record keeping and strong lines of communication with families and outside agencies. New staff are trained in child protection awareness and the coordinator is able to react to urgent situations speedily and effectively. Healthy living is promoted and practised. The school's breadth of care and support is impressive.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are of high quality. Attention to an environment conducive to learning has been very effective, although the full impact on achievement is yet to be realised. Key changes since the last inspection have been in the appointment of an extended leadership team. The headteacher has been highly successful in allowing staff to develop their strengths, in making key appointments, and restructuring management systems. The team has worked swiftly to redefine responsibilities and create efficient lines of communication. Parents and pupils have been involved in the process of deciding the new school's name and vision. A new set of priorities link logically together within the school's mission statement of 'Achievement, Respect and Transformation'. The overarching commitment is to raise standards throughout the school. The move to Arts College Status has been instrumental in providing a more creative approach both to teaching and learning and to initiatives to raise achievement.

A wealth of well-planned initiatives to promote high standards is well implemented and monitored. The school improvement plan sets clear goals with achievable timescales. Systems for quality assurance, evaluation and monitoring are of a high quality. Information about how well pupils are making progress is used carefully and efficiently. Some subjects and departments are exceptionally well managed, but rigour varies between subjects and so there are marked discrepancies in performance.

The school is rightly proud of its inclusive ethos. Staff actively promote mutual respect and reach out to the wider community. Peer mentoring, a 'buddy system', personal tutors and a clearly understood behaviour policy are well managed and consistently implemented.

Learning resources and accommodation are good. A well-resourced and managed Learning Resource Centre is highly valued by all pupils because it provides high quality opportunities and support for independent study. Accessible, good ICT resources are deployed around the school. Finances are efficiently managed with due regard to best value and accountability; consequently, the school provides good value for money.

Governors are actively involved in the life of the school. Expertise in financial management and strategic planning ensures efficient and appropriate deployment of resources and monitoring of budget allocation. Governors give considerable time to be up-to-date with educational thought and have high expectations of the school's ability to improve the life chances of their girls.

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

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	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school last week. We enjoyed talking with you and were impressed with your politeness and enthusiasm, and the way you explained how the school was helping you learn.

This is what we found in your school.

- You and your parents approve of the new name and new start for your school. You think that in most areas the school is working hard to make sure you achieve your best.
- Your school is well led. The headteacher and all the staff work together to create a harmonious atmosphere where you can enjoy each other's company and help each other learn. Your enjoyment at being in the school shone through during our two days with you. The school helps you be safe and you understand the need to be healthy.
- The school values the life in its different communities and you also contribute well to mutual understanding and respect.
- The school is helping some of you improve your attendance and we think they are right to do this. We agree with the school that when pupils are away from school for any length of time, their learning suffers.
- Most of you achieve well in some subjects and some of you achieve well generally. Those of you in the sixth form are improving attainment. However, the inspectors agreed with the school that overall your success in exams and tests needs to be improved.
- Teaching is generally good although there are areas where it could be improved, so that teachers help you better to know what you need to do to understand what you are studying and what to do to improve.
- The curriculum is improving and offering you all more choice to suit how you learn and your expectations for the future. You are able to access good advice to help you make those important decisions.

There are two main things which the school now needs to do. Firstly, staff must make sure that you all achieve at your best and show that in improved exam results. To do that, the best teaching in the school should be the practice in all your subjects and lessons.

Can we thank you and your parents for giving us your views. We wish you every success.