



Helsby High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111440
LEA Cheshire
Inspection number 278697
Inspection dates 9 March 2006 to 9 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Leszek Iwaskow HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Chester Road
School category	Community		Helsby
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Frodsham, Cheshire WA6 0HY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01928 723551
Number on roll	1403	Fax number	01928 723093
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr T Payton
Date of previous inspection	13 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr R Evans

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 18	9 March 2006 - 9 March 2006	278697

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act. It was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

Description of the school

Helsby High School is a mixed 11- 18 comprehensive school. There are 1,403 pupils on roll, including 271 in the sixth form. Attainment on entry is above the national average although there are variations across year groups. Pupils generally come from advantaged homes and there are few from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are few pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Helsby is a popular school and is oversubscribed. The school is also a specialist science college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with school leaders that this is a good school with some outstanding features and practice. Good progress has been made since the last inspection with all the issues identified previously having been addressed. In addition a wide range of developments have been initiated to improve the provision. The investment in additional support and the mentoring process has been highly beneficial and the innovative work on 'behaviour levels' has been appreciated by parents as an indicator of their children's application and efforts in class. Pupils attain high standards but make especially good progress in their personal development and exhibit many of the positive elements of good citizens.

The school is well managed and is building up the capacity to improve even further. There is a real awareness of what needs to be done to move the school forward. Strengths and weaknesses have been accurately identified and the school has a clear programme of how to make things even better. This is well supported by a structured monitoring programme which is identifying good practice and areas which still need further support and development. This could also be used more effectively to support and encourage the sharing of best practice.

Most pupils enjoy school and appreciate especially those lessons where they can think creatively or use their artistic talents. Pupils particularly benefit from the wide range of opportunities offered to them from outside a classroom setting. The opportunities for the pupils to work independently are relatively few and this is an area for development. The pupils are proud of their sporting prowess but need to resist the temptations of less healthy options on sale at break and lunchtime if they are to stay healthy. Parents express some concerns about communication with the school but appreciate the many varied opportunities offered to their children.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards are above average and students achieve well enabling many of them to continue successfully into higher education. Students learn effectively because teaching is good and assessment systems are strong, although more work remains to be done in developing their independent learning skills. Students are very well supported by staff at all levels. There is an outstanding range of opportunities for students' personal development which enables them to grow into enterprising, well-rounded young adults. Increasingly their views are being taken into account in shaping the future direction of the sixth form. The curriculum is being expanded successfully to make provision more inclusive through the progressive establishment of vocational courses. The excellent retention figures demonstrate student levels of satisfaction with provision. The sixth form is well led and managed, especially in pastoral matters. The monitoring of teaching and learning is developing, but it is not yet sufficiently rigorous.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Learners enter the school with above average attainment. They build on this making excellent progress and inspectors' judge learners' overall achievement is outstanding. The school monitors performance closely and is quick to identify any weaknesses and put required support into place. This has resulted in rapid improvement being made in design and technology and modern foreign languages. Current support is being focused on English. At general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) all subjects perform well with standards well above the national average. The targeted use of support staff, a well organized mentoring system and effective intervention strategies ensure that pupils at risk of underachieving succeed. Lower ability pupils, especially boys, make particularly good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils develop well into confident, mature and articulate individuals. There is very good participation in an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. In this way pupils are enabled to develop and display their talents. There are imaginative visits designed to support learning across the curriculum, such as the Year 8 visit to a zoo. Pupils are well aware of multi-cultural issues through lessons as well as 'Cultural Diversity' days. Pupils' enjoyment of their school life is reflected in their very good attendance. The incidence of bullying is small and it is resolved effectively by staff and through other strategies, such as the new peer mediation initiative. Exclusions are below average. Behaviour is good overall, but some parents, particularly of Year 9 pupils, have concerns about low level disruption in some lessons. Pupils are aware of the need to eat healthily, but this is not promoted as actively as it could be by the school. Fizzy drinks are not actively discouraged. Pupils are also able to purchase chocolate brownies and sausage rolls at break and chips each lunchtime and for some the temptation is too great. The recent expansion of work related learning is providing pupils with a good range of opportunities to develop enterprise awareness and skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Lessons are very well structured and lesson objectives and activities are mostly well focussed on developing pupils' skills. Teachers build successfully on pupils' prior knowledge and regularly refer back to the objectives as 'signposts' to guide pupils' learning. They know pupils well and question them effectively. Relationships are good, and pupils are quick to settle

which ensures a prompt start to most lessons. There is some very good use of techniques such as spider diagrams and learning frames to help pupils express ideas clearly both orally and in writing. Pupils particularly enjoy and achieve well in subjects such as the creative arts, where they are fully engaged, encouraged to display imagination and to work collaboratively as well as independently. On some occasions the balance is tipped too far towards structured learning and away from the development of thinking skills and independence. Pupils are provided both individually and as a group with good, written and oral feedback to help them reflect on their learning. Some aspects of assessment, such as peer assessment and the active use of pupil targets, are underdeveloped.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Since the last inspection, the school has made significant improvements to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. This has addressed previously identified weaknesses. Inspectors judge current provision to be outstanding with greater diversity of choice available to meet pupils' varying needs. Pupils are now able to study drama and physical education at GCSE as well as a range of vocational options relevant to ages 14 - 19. Statutory requirements are met through all pupils studying short courses in information and communication technology (ICT), religious education and citizenship. Pupils and students benefit from a wide range of extracurricular and enrichment opportunities. They are proud of their successes at sport and enjoy many opportunities to excel in music and drama as well as, amongst others, the more physical challenges of an established Duke of Edinburgh Award programme. Budding young entrepreneurs of tomorrow are cutting their teeth and developing financial and team building skills through a range of enterprise and enrichment days. An innovative and timetabled 'thinking skills' induction programme enables pupils in Year 7 to cultivate an awareness of learning styles and strategies which helps them develop as learners.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils are provided with high quality care to ensure their requirements are fully met. There are especially good procedures for identifying the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Appropriate and creative strategies are used to help them and learning support assistants who know them well work closely with them and adapt materials skilfully. As a result, the pupils grow in confidence and achieve very well. Contacts with a range of external agencies are highly effective, enabling the school to make full use of their expertise in working with vulnerable children. The new learning mentor is being deployed well to encourage some pupils to stay engaged in learning. All pupils have a readily accessible adult to listen to their problems or a sanctuary, such as the 'Seclusion Room' to escape to at other times. Heads of Year provide strong pastoral and academic support for all pupils. Pupil progress is regularly monitored and tracked to identify and rectify any underperformance to ensure they

meet challenging targets. Older pupils are guided very well when considering their options for post -16 study or employment. An aspect for improvement is the need to canvass parental and pupil opinions more effectively.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that leadership and management, including in the sixth form, is good. Senior managers have a clear vision for the school and continually strive to improve and build on success. The detailed and comprehensive development plan is driven by issues identified by subject staff and addresses real issues in the classroom. Strengths and areas which need developing are clearly identified. A rigorous monitoring system has been established and this is helping to support improvements in teaching and learning. Where teachers and middle managers are innovative and prepared to take risks, this has led to clear improvements although greater efforts need to be made to share good practice. Governors work well with managers and perform a valuable role as 'critical friend'. Staff are well supported in their professional development and an established induction programme helps new staff to settle quickly into the routines of school life. Middle managers are encouraged to develop their personal and management skills through participation in the 'Leading from the Middle' programme. Very effective use is made of a wide range of external agencies and good use has been made of support from Local Authority consultants. Resources are used well and focus on providing quality support. Most parents are very appreciative of the efforts being made to make their children's experience formative and rewarding.

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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?	2	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?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

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?	1	1
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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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	No
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

This letter is to tell you about our recent visit to your school to inspect the quality of the education you are experiencing. We particularly enjoyed meeting you and talking about lessons and the many activities you are involved in. What you had to tell us was very valuable and helped us come to the decision that your school is good and has improved in many respects over the last five years. It is well managed and provides a safe and caring environment for you to learn in. We enjoyed our brief stay and would like to thank you for your help.

We were particularly impressed with your maturity and the 'bubbly' way you engaged us during our discussions. We particularly enjoyed listening to how you immersed yourself in school life and the wide range of opportunities that you are offered. We recognise how proud you, your parents and your teachers are of your many achievements both in the classroom and on the sports field. Many of you stay on into the sixth form because you enjoy what the school offers and have aspirations to go onto further study.

You particularly enjoy and achieve well in subjects such as the creative arts where you can express your individuality and imagination. Lessons which allow you to research and develop independent learning skills engage you and prepare you well for higher studies. Your teachers are working hard to make your lessons interesting and challenging and are taking note of your preferred learning styles. In return they expect you to be well behaved in lessons and responsive to the tasks they set for you. We know that many of you enjoy playing sport and that you all are aware of the need to eat healthily. However, many of you can't resist the temptation of chocolate brownies and sausage rolls on sale at break time or chips at lunchtime. You need to be more responsible with what you eat - remember 'healthy bodies mean healthy minds'. We are sure that you will continue to work hard and play hard and make your time in school a successful and enjoyable experience.