



Highfields School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 112950
LEA DERBYSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 279063
Inspection dates 2 March 2006 to 3 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Colin Humphreys LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Upper Lumsdale
School category	Community		DE4 5NA
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01629 581888
Number on roll	1491	Fax number	01629 57572
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Bruce Buckley
Date of previous inspection	20 September 1999	Headteacher	Dr. Ramsey Tetlow

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 2 March 2006 - 3 March 2006	Inspection number 279063
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Highfields School is a larger than average comprehensive school, providing education for students from Matlock and many villages in the surrounding area. The school has specialist status as an Arts College. It is part of a federation of eleven secondary schools in the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales. Many students come from relatively affluent homes, but others are from areas of social disadvantage. Overall, the students' ability when they start at the school is above average. The school is based on two sites, nearly 2 miles apart. Years 7 and 8 are based at the Starkholmes site. The split site causes a number of operational difficulties which the school works hard to overcome. It also offers certain advantages for pupils transferring from primary schools which parents recognise. About 30 students are of minority ethnic or mixed background, while the rest are white British. The proportion of students with learning difficulties is broadly average, and the number having free school meals is low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The school and inspectors agree that this is a satisfactory school with some good features, and there is a strong commitment and determination to make improvement. The school has a very inclusive approach and knows its pupils and students well. Results in the 2005 tests for 14 year olds and in the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations were above average, as they have been in recent years. In the sixth form, results were well above average and these students make very good progress. However, in the run up to their GCSE examinations, many of the sixteen-year-old pupils did not make as much progress as they should. Although the results were above average, given the pupils' high ability their results could have been better still. Some lower-attaining pupils, particularly boys, underachieve. The pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy school, show interest in their work and mostly apply themselves well. Their moral, social and cultural development is good but aspects of their spiritual development need improving. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. There are many examples of good teaching including some outstanding teaching but this is due to the talents of individuals, rather than to a well developed whole-school approach to teaching and learning. Some teachers make good use of assessment data to inform their planning but there is scope for improvement. The curriculum is satisfactory and being developed further to meet the needs of all pupils better. The sixth form curriculum meets the needs of those students studying for AS and A levels very well. Courses for other students are beginning to be developed. The pupils are well cared for and the school provides good guidance and support about the next stages of education. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new headteacher has a clear vision for the school's future and he is giving a good lead to school improvement. Until recently, the management structures lacked coherence and clear lines of accountability. Training for senior and middle managers has not always been effective but they are eager to pull together and improve the school. This means the school has a good capacity for improvement. It provides satisfactory value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school and inspectors agree that the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is good. It is well led and managed. The school has rightly started to broaden the curriculum to meet the needs of more students. Students benefit from much good teaching and very good care and support. Their progress is carefully monitored by subject teachers and tutors which enables them to achieve well. Students willingly engage in a variety of community activities and many enjoy the excellent range of enrichment opportunities. These make a significant contribution to their personal development, which is very good. Sixth form students provide good role models for younger pupils and are very good ambassadors for the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure all students consistently make good progress so they achieve in line with their abilities. - Develop stronger, whole-school approaches to teaching and learning, building on existing strengths, and make more consistent use of assessment information. - Continue to develop the curriculum in order to meet the needs of all learners better. - Provide leaders at all levels with a more effective programme of training and professional development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement overall is sound. In their first three years at the school pupils generally make good progress in mathematics and science. In the 2005 tests for 14 year olds pupils achieved well above average levels in these subjects. Progress in English is satisfactory and although the results were not as high as in mathematics and science, they were still above average. Boys and girls achieve equally well up to the age of 14. The school has a history of consistently high GCSE results, and the 2005 results were above average. However, they were much lower than they ought to have been, given the very high ability of the year group. Pupils made too little overall progress between the ages of 14 and 16, and many did not achieve the targets the school expected. A notable exception was in mathematics, where the pupils made outstanding progress and reached very high standards, showing just what these pupils can achieve when the educational provision is good. The school is acutely aware that action is needed to ensure pupils make consistently good progress across all subjects. Pupils who start at the school with lower levels of attainment do not always make enough progress, and too many older boys underachieve. Students with learning difficulties make good progress. Standards and progress in the sixth form over the last three years have been very high though they were not as high in 2005 as in the previous two years. It is too soon to say if the school's new status as a performing arts college is making a contribution to increasing the pupils' overall achievement, but there are exciting plans for the future.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They are supportive of the school and value the wide range of extra-curricular activities that the school provides. Sixth form students make a valuable contribution to the life of the whole school. Pupils respect each other, their teachers and other adults and this is reflected in their good behaviour in lessons and around the school. Respect for themselves is less evident; some make too little effort to be punctual to school and to lessons or take enough pride in their personal appearance. Nevertheless, attendance is above average and very few pupils are excluded. Students confirm the school's view of itself as a safe and inclusive

community in which they have a voice, as for example through their exceptional work in the school and student councils, which recently included work on the healthier schools initiative and work with the governing body. They participate enthusiastically in a range of cultural and sporting activities. Through citizenship and enterprise activities pupils develop economic awareness and work-related skills effectively but other areas such as computer skills are less well developed. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good overall; their spiritual development is less well developed and needs further attention. Pupils develop a clear sense of social awareness within a strong moral framework and make a good contribution to the wider community through their fund-raising activities for charity. Cultural aspects are developed well through links with outside organisations and the school's recent specialist performing arts status, but some of this is in the early stages of development. Opportunities are missed to enable pupils to reflect meaningfully on human endeavour and appreciate the wonders of the natural world. However, the quality of displays of artwork and the programme of concerts contribute well to the pupils' personal development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school and inspectors agree that the quality of teaching and learning in the main school is satisfactory overall; in the sixth form teaching is good. Teachers are well qualified and many communicate their enthusiasm for their subject in a stimulating manner. However, there is no well developed whole-school approach to teaching and learning, which accounts for inconsistencies in the way in which lessons are taught and the progress pupils make. Aspects of the national strategies are not well developed, for example, literacy and the use of clear, shared learning objectives. In the best lessons, teachers carefully plan their use of time with challenging and varied activities which actively involve the pupils. These lessons have a good pace and ensure pupils work hard. In a few lessons teachers do not allow pupils and students sufficient time for reflection or to develop their independent learning skills by exploring ideas and sharing opinions. Although teachers are well informed about pupils' prior attainment and capabilities sometimes the information is not used skilfully enough to ensure that tasks match pupils' needs or provide a suitable challenge. This prevents some students from making good progress, whether in set groups or in classes of mixed ability. As a consequence, some pupils, both more able and less able, develop passive attitudes and achieve less well than might otherwise be expected. Almost all pupils know and understand their targets and whether or not the targets are sufficiently challenging, pupils are eager to succeed and meet them. Work is marked regularly; the best marking includes helpful comments so that pupils know how they can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school offers a satisfactory curriculum that is increasingly broader and more flexible due to the appropriate introduction of vocational courses at Key Stage 4. At present the number of pupils needing and, therefore following these courses is small. Some pupils benefit from the Bridging Apprenticeship scheme which involves attending a local college, while others' needs are met through extended work experience placements or Youth Award schemes. The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements in information and communication technology in Year 9. Staff are aware of a range of national strategies for improving literacy and numeracy and although some strategies have been implemented there is no systematic whole-school development of them. All aspects of the citizenship national curriculum are covered, assessed and reported on. Work-related skills are covered effectively and add considerably to pupils' enjoyment and achievement. There is good access to careers guidance and an effective work experience programme. The recently acquired performing arts status is now enabling the school to broaden its curriculum in new and exciting ways and build upon the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, such as in music. However, this work is in the early stages of development. The sixth form curriculum is well suited to students studying AS and A levels. It is broadening further to allow for a more inclusive intake, and this is a positive development. There is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities in which almost all get involved. In school, sixth form students contribute well to mentoring Year 9 pupils, helping in local primary schools and organising various fund raising events through a well-established and effective student council.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, support and guidance is good overall. The school has a very inclusive approach and knows its pupils and students well. There are effective arrangements for the protection of children and a good awareness of health and safety issues, although both sites present disability access difficulties. The school provides good, comprehensive advice about subject choices and options at appropriate stages. Leavers receive well-considered information and guidance about a range of education, training and employment opportunities. Academic progress is regularly reviewed although reports to parents do not always provide enough indication of where improvement is necessary. There is scope to sharpen the way in which assessment data is used to set targets and support pupils' academic development. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good as a result of the well-established procedures, commitment and expertise of the staff involved with their care and support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory and improving. The newly appointed headteacher has a very clear vision for the school's development and has established well-judged priorities. He has quickly gained the confidence of governors, staff and learners. The senior management team have recently made a thorough re-evaluation of the school's recent performance and correctly identified its strengths and weaknesses. They have a strong commitment to making improvements and the capacity to do so. However, the training of both middle and senior managers has not been effective enough in the recent past, and the school has fallen behind in its school improvement work. Until recently, management structures lacked clarity because lines of accountability were confused. Comprehensive and improved systems are planned or now being put in place for monitoring and reviewing the school's work, with the appropriate priority on improving teaching and learning, and on using assessment data effectively to raise achievement. Subject leaders vary in their effectiveness, and this is shown by the gaps in performance between subject departments. Governors are strongly supportive of the school. They are well informed about its work and monitor its performance closely. They are eager to see the school perform well. The school has well-established and productive links with its feeder primary schools and other secondary schools in the area, but some parents feel their views are not sought enough. The school is committed to the principle of equal opportunities. The effective inclusion centres and the effective provision for pupils with learning difficulties are good examples of this. There are sound plans for eliminating the present budget deficit. In this context, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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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?	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	2	1
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	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
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?	2	2

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?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
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	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

As you know, we recently inspected your school to judge how well it was performing, and I am writing to tell you about our findings. First, I would like to thank all of you who helped with the inspection; you spoke honestly and openly about your school. Our judgement is that Highfields is a satisfactory school with some good features. We found that your behaviour and attitudes were good and that you participated well in lessons and extra-curricular activities. However, some of you need to make sure you are punctual to school and to lessons. Not all of you wear your school uniform smartly. Standards in the school are above average. They are especially good in the sixth form. However, although standards are high, we found that Year 11 pupils did not achieve as well as they should have in 2005, given their ability. Also, some of the older boys and some lower-attaining pupils do not make enough progress. We have asked the school to make sure that in future all pupils make good progress. You have some good teachers and a few who are excellent but we found teaching and learning to be satisfactory overall. We think the school should do more to help all teachers have a shared understanding of what good teaching is. The school provides you with appropriate courses and has exciting plans to develop these further, especially now the school has performing arts status. The school gives good guidance and support about the choices you have to make and helps you understand how well you are progressing. Dr Tetlow is leading the school forward effectively; he has already made a difference in a short space of time. Staff are very committed and determined to make more improvements and you should feel confident that the school is going to move forward in a positive way. Of course you must play your part by being proud of your school and by working hard. Good luck for the future.