



Hummersknott School & Language College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114323
LEA Darlington
Inspection number 279363
Inspection dates 8 December 2005 to 9 December 2005
Reporting inspector Beverley Barlow

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Edinburgh Drive
School category	Community		Darlington
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		County Durham, DL3 8AR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01325 241191
Number on roll	1225	Fax number	01325 241122
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Moira Bayne
Date of previous inspection	1 October 1999	Headteacher	Pat Howarth

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 8 December 2005 - 9 December 2005	Inspection number 279363
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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

Hummersknott School & Language College is an 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive located in a pleasant suburb on the south west outskirts of Darlington. The school is oversubscribed and is larger than average with 1,225 students on roll. A high proportion of students are of white British heritage; a small number of students speak English as an additional language. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances; about 10% of students come from areas of social disadvantage. The proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is slightly above average. Students enter the school with levels of literacy and numeracy that are higher than average. The school achieved specialist language status in September 2000. A range of extended services have been developed with partners such as the youth service, police, local primary schools and the further education (FE) colleges.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school. Thorough and effective management and strong leadership are well supported by the governing body. The headteacher has a clear vision and staff are enthusiastic in supporting this and raising standards in the school. Standards in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are good. In 2005, the proportion of students achieving 5 A* to C general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades is well above the national average. The results indicate that the rate of students' progress has improved and is broadly average. As a specialist language school, the proportion of students achieving high grades in French and German are very good. Students are not as successful in Spanish and Mandarin. In English at Key Stage 3, students do not do as well as expected given their results in the tests at the end of Key Stage 2.

Teaching is good overall but there are some less effective lessons. Senior managers are working hard to further improve the quality of teaching and learning and there is evidence of effective staff development and the sharing of good practice. Assessment is used to set targets but it is not consistently used to plan lessons. Students are cared for well in a safe and pleasant working environment. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used consistently to support students' learning. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and provides flexible opportunities in Key Stage 4 that meet the needs of students. There is good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and they make good progress. Students enjoy being at school, behaviour is generally good and they respond well to the wide range of opportunities for their personal development. Managers and teachers make good use of assessment information to track students' progress. The improved GCSE results in 2005 clearly demonstrate that the school has good capacity to improve.

not applicable

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in English at Key Stage 3.
- Improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that it is consistently good.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school correctly believes that standards are good and improving. When students enter the school in Year 7, their standards are above average as indicated by test scores at the end of Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 3, students make good progress in mathematics and science and standards are above average. In English, students do not do as well as expected given their results in the tests at the end of Key Stage 2.

At the end of Key Stage 4, the percentage of students who get five or more higher GCSE grades, whilst above average, declined between 2002 and 2004. In 2005, the proportion of students achieving five GCSE grades A* to C improved significantly and was much higher than in recent years. In most subjects, pass rates at higher grades

increased in 2005. Results are strong in many subjects. The school is aware that results in some subjects, for example, ICT and Spanish, are lower and has put in place a series of measures to raise standards, with some success. Standards in French and German are very good. The overall progress of students by the end of Key Stage 4, bearing in mind their above average starting point, is satisfactory and improving. Boys make better progress than girls when compared with the national picture. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do well and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Students enjoy school and are keen to learn. Behaviour of most students is good and the school is an orderly community. Students feel safe in school and they know who to go to if they have a problem. Students commented that the number of incidents of bullying have declined in the last two years and that, if it occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. The level of exclusions is high. The student support unit, established in September 2005, has been effective in greatly reducing the number of exclusions this term. New systems to monitor and promote good attendance have led to improvements and attendance is now good.

Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Students respond well to the wide range of opportunities for their personal development. Students understand right and wrong, they are aware of aspects of their own culture and that of others. Students benefit from a wide variety of overseas trips including to Europe, Russia, China and Nepal. They are well informed about how to live a healthy lifestyle and try to put into practice the good advice they receive in lessons and from the numerous outside speakers who come to share their expertise. Participation in physical education and sport is good. There is a range of healthy foods. Students have a say in the running of the school through an active school council. They raise money for local charities and support a school in Africa. Students in Key Stage 4 are proud of the support they give to younger pupils and children in a local primary school through paired reading. Students develop in confidence and skills and are well prepared for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school judges the quality of teaching and learning as satisfactory; inspectors' observation of lessons found it to be good overall. It varies from satisfactory to outstanding. The school's observation of lessons has correctly identified strengths and areas for development. The school's focus on improving teaching and learning is having a positive impact on the standards of students' work. There is an increased willingness amongst teachers to share good practice. Teachers have sound subject

knowledge and have a good relationship with students. Lessons are well planned and have a clear structure. Except in a few cases, behaviour is managed effectively. Teaching assistants and learning mentors are deployed effectively to support students' learning.

In the best lessons, teaching is energetic and enthusiastic. All students are engaged; they respond well to a wide range of challenging activities and make good progress. Students enjoy lessons with practical activities and where they can think through the solutions to problems and work independently. In less successful lessons, though satisfactory, the pace was slower; students remained passive during lengthy teacher explanations and it was not made clear how they should complete tasks. Assessment is used to set targets and monitor progress but it is not consistently used to plan lessons. The quality of marking is uneven across subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school rightly judges its curriculum to be good with a number of strengths reflecting the school's specialist language status. In Years 7 to 9, students have a broad and balanced curriculum and develop very good skills in numeracy and science. The opportunities to develop skills in literacy and information and communication technology have improved since September. At Key Stage 4, students are clear about progression routes and the options system. The provision is now more flexible and includes a wide range of both GCSE and vocational courses. In keeping with the school's specialist status, all students study at least one modern foreign language from a good range of options that includes Mandarin. A few students do vocational courses at the local FE College. Citizenship education is well developed across the school and effectively enables students to understand their rights and responsibilities. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and meets their needs well. A programme for gifted and talented students is well established. There is a very good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. All students have the opportunity to gain valuable workplace experience through enterprise activities and local business links.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support for students are good. Students comment that they like the house system and value the support they receive from their form teacher and head of house. Child protection procedures are in place. Teachers have up-to-date knowledge and understanding of child protection arrangements and ensure that they are followed. The majority of parents are pleased with the work of the school. A small minority have concerns about students' behaviour or feel that students' and parents' views are not listened to enough. The school has very good arrangements for identifying and supporting vulnerable students and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, the targets set for these students are not consistent and do not always indicate clearly what the student needs to do next to improve their work. Support for students is enhanced by the school's liaison with a wide range of support

agencies. Year 7 students value the way in which they are prepared for their new school. A significant number of students with very low levels of basic skills achieve well in practical subjects. Strategies to identify underachievement and provide additional support, for example through mentors and homework clubs, are improving students' progress. All students, together with their form teacher and parents, review their performance twice a year. Students receive well planned careers guidance at all stages. In Year 9, the arrangements for students to make their Key Stage 4 option choices are comprehensive. Good information is provided about post-16 options. The school has good links with the local sixth form college, further education (FE) college and Teeside University.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The school has made significant improvements, particularly in the last two years under the leadership of the new headteacher and senior leadership team. Through wide consultation, there is a shared vision of how the school intends to improve. The school's self-evaluation is good and staff have an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Senior managers know the school well and are energetic in tackling weaknesses. The school's improvement plan clearly identifies strategies to further raise standards, and improve the quality of teaching and learning, students' experience and the school's environment. Planning has improved since the last inspection. Governance is good; governors are supportive and well informed about the school. Until recently, improvement since the last inspection had been too slow; the issues raised have now been addressed.

Middle managers have been given more responsibility and are more accountable for the performance of their departments. Managers have focused correctly on raising achievement; coursework and revision strategies were put in place. The impact of their success can be seen in the improved GCSE results in 2005. Standards in Key Stage 3 are better than the previous year, but further improvement is required, particularly in English. Good systems have been put in place to track and monitor students' progress. The profile of teaching and learning has been raised through more rigorous lesson observations and the introduction of more effective staff development. Financial management is sound and the school provides good value for money. Resources are well managed, though some classrooms are cramped. Good use is made of students' work to create attractive wall displays and celebrate success. ICT facilities are now good, although the school recognises they are not used consistently in supporting students' learning.

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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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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

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

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12 December 2005

Dear students

Thank you for welcoming the Ofsted inspection team into your school last week. We enjoyed our visit to your school. You made us very welcome and it was very interesting to visit your lessons and talk to several of you and find out your views. We also looked at the questionnaires sent in by your parents. The majority of them have great confidence in the work of the school in leading you to success.

These are our main findings from the inspection.

Hummersknott is a good school and has improved in the last couple of years. The school is well led by the headteacher and the staff are working hard to encourage you to do the very best you can. The school's examination results have improved and in 2005 the GCSE results were much better than in previous years. We are satisfied with the progress you are making but some of you could still do better.

Much of the teaching is good and those who need extra help receive it. You told us that you enjoy coming to school and appreciate the hard work and support of your teachers.

There is a wide range of courses for you to choose from in Key Stage 4 including GCSEs, a modern foreign language and some vocational courses. Your teachers have developed a curriculum which is preparing you well for your future choices in life. The school provides a good range of interesting activities for you.

Your teachers care for you well, guiding you and supporting you as you make important choices. You told us that you know exactly what to do if there is a problem. Your behaviour is generally good. Older students said they had seen an improvement in behaviour. You told us that you feel safe in school and that bullying incidents are dealt with quickly.

Overall, your attendance has improved but quite rightly some of you have individual targets to improve it further.

Your headteacher is clear about what he wants to do and how this can be achieved. He has worked hard with the staff in improving examination results. The most important thing the school has to do now is keep up standards, ensure that everyone achieves as well as they can and make teaching even better. We are confident that the staff at the school can achieve this and you are willing to put in the hard work.

There is much for you and your teachers to be proud of at Hummersknott School & Language College. We wish you every success for the future in all that you do.

Yours sincerely

Mrs B Barlow

Her Majesty's Inspector