



The Hertfordshire and Essex High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117592
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280124
Inspection dates 15 March 2006 to 16 March 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Stephen Grounds LI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Warwick Road
School category	Foundation		CM23 5NJ
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01279 654127
Number on roll	985	Fax number	01279 508810
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs. Caroline Franks
Date of previous inspection	22 January 2001	Headteacher	Ms. Alison Garner

Age group 11 to 18	Inspection dates 15 March 2006 - 16 March 2006	Inspection number 280124
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The Hertfordshire and Essex High School is an average sized 11-18 comprehensive school for girls. It admits some boys into its sixth form. The school is popular and over-subscribed and its numbers are the same as at the time of the last inspection. Historically the school was the local girls' grammar school, but now, apart from 10% of students admitted on the basis of musical or sporting aptitude, no interviewing or testing prior to admission takes place. Students come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Few are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the school has no students with statements of special educational need. At the time of the inspection there were also no students for whom English is an additional language. At sixth form level the school has to compete with other providers. A significant number of students continue their education elsewhere, many travelling to the sixth form college provision in Cambridge. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well above average. The school has been designated as a specialist school with science college status since 2003.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors confirm that the Hertfordshire and Essex High School is a highly effective school with many outstanding features. It provides good value for money. It is well regarded by its students and their parents. The school's self-evaluation clearly indicates that the headteacher and the senior management team have a good understanding of the school's strengths as well as what it should do to improve further. Students make good progress, especially at Key Stage 3, and progress in the sixth form is outstanding. In most classes there is an orderly and tranquil atmosphere for learning. Students enjoy their time in the school. The broad and balanced curriculum provides good opportunities for students to develop as they progress through the school. The range of activities available outside formal lessons is unusually wide, with notable strengths in music. The school's specialist science status is used to good effect so that there are curricular options outside the normal curriculum. However, there are some inconsistencies in the school's provision of personal and social education. Teaching and learning are generally good and contribute to students' personal development so that, by the end of the main school, students are well informed and articulate, and ideally prepared for the world of work. However, there is some variability in teaching and insufficient opportunities to share good practice and to raise the quality of teaching. The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The school is well managed by the senior management team. At middle management level, however, there is a lack of consistency in the use of assessment information and the monitoring of teaching. The new headteacher has introduced a refreshing vision for continuous improvement in the school which has the support of staff and governors. The school has addressed nearly all of the issues arising from the previous inspection. The new leadership provides the school with a particularly good capacity for improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school judges the sixth form to be good. Overall, taking into account the students who are recruited into it, or who stay on into the sixth form, inspectors judge the quality to be outstanding. Students attain standards that are well above average and which, year-on-year, have improved from the already high standards gained at the time of the last inspection. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The students are very committed to their learning and consistently work very hard. They embrace responsibility eagerly and are very caring towards each other. They are very helpful towards younger students and organise fund raising events, including one to support the partner school in Uganda. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Lessons are planned thoroughly and challenge students very well. Teachers' knowledge of the subjects they teach is very good. The curriculum in the sixth form is good and has many strengths. It is an academic curriculum which provides well for the students who enrol in it. They have full access to the full range of enrichment activities that are on offer outside the formal timetable. However, the programme to teach general studies is underdeveloped and there are no formal

opportunities for students to develop their physical skills. Students are full of praise for the outstanding care, support and guidance they receive. Their progress is monitored very closely and they are provided with detailed information to help them to attain the standards of which they are capable. They also receive excellent guidance which helps them to prepare for the next stages of their education and for the world of work. The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- increase the consistency of the use of assessment information and the monitoring of teaching in order to improve students' performance - share good practice in teaching so that it is all of high quality - develop a more coherent approach to the teaching of personal, social and health education - in the sixth form develop a more effective programme which encompasses general studies and recreational activities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The attainment of students starting at the school is well above average and there is a much higher than average proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels at the end of Year 6. Standards on entry have been rising slowly but steadily over the last five years. The standards attained at the end of Key Stage 3 are significantly better than national averages and are exceptionally high in all three core subjects. The progress students make during this key stage is good overall, although only average in English, is significantly better than the national average in science and mathematics and in terms of whole-school performance. At Key Stage 4 the standards attained, whilst still exceptionally high, have shown a recent decline. For example, the number of students gaining five or more A*-C grades, whilst high at 81%, has fallen by 8% in four years. Overall progress to the end of Key Stage 4 is only at the national average and progress in English is significantly lower than the national average. Nevertheless, students with learning difficulties make good progress. There are significant variations in the performance of students in different subjects. A strength of the school is that 85% of students take ten or more GCSEs. The school has set itself very challenging targets for GCSE performance in mathematics and science as part of its specialist school status. In 2005 those for science were not met whilst those for mathematics were almost met. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is broadly average because some students from the main school leave. Progress is excellent and so standards attained in the sixth form are well above average and have steadily improved over time.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well being of the students are outstanding. The vast majority of students thoroughly enjoy their time at school. For the most part relationships are exemplary. The vast majority of students behave extremely well, but

a small minority do not give sufficient attention to their learning and take unfair advantage of weaker teachers, thus disrupting the learning of their peers. In lessons most students have a real zest for learning. Students appreciate the chance to take charge of their learning and are poised to extend this further to evaluating their own progress. Attendance is excellent and has been consistently high for many years. The spiritual development of the students is excellent. The students have a very well developed social conscience. Empathy and practical help for the less fortunate is highlighted through extensive charitable fundraising. Students know what is right and wrong and discuss moral issues with clarity and sensitivity. Students collaborate very well in lessons and enjoy great success in team events. Older students genuinely enjoy helping with the younger students. Students have a good knowledge of other cultures and ways of life, particularly enhanced by the strong links with Uganda. They participate enthusiastically in dance, drama, music and arts events. Students know how to keep themselves safe. They handle equipment very sensibly in lessons and conduct themselves properly in and out of the school. Students place a high priority on following a healthy lifestyle, although the sixth form students do not all take sufficient physical exercise. Contribution to both the school community and beyond is outstanding. Many students are active participants both in the school council and the sub-committees and also willingly take on smaller jobs, such as litter collection. Students are particularly well prepared for life and work beyond school because not only do they have high standards in literacy and numeracy, they are clear about the options available for future careers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning is good in the main school was confirmed by the inspection. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons thoroughly. Lessons usually proceed at a good pace, capturing students' interest and enthusiasm. As a result, students sustain their efforts and work together well. In lessons, where students are set by ability, work usually matches their needs very well. However, in some lessons for mixed ability classes the work set for the most able is too easy, whilst that for lower attaining students is too hard. When this happens some students lose interest and their progress is inhibited. Teachers often use questions well to test students' knowledge and provide them with good opportunities to express their views. At other times, students are not given enough time to collect their thoughts and to plan their answers. Consequently, the answers they give do not present a true reflection of their knowledge and abilities. Most teachers have high expectations and the majority of students behave well in lessons, taking pride in their work. Where teachers manage behaviour less well students sometimes distract each other and do not always work as hard as they should. Teachers undertake detailed and accurate assessments of students' progress and provide them

with clear information about how to improve. Students have challenging individual targets for their learning and they are prepared well to tackle examinations with confidence. However, in Years 7 to 9, teachers do not always seek students' views about how well they are learning and what they think they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good in the main school and the sixth form. The broad and balanced curriculum provides good opportunities for most learners to progress and perform well. There is a strong emphasis on science in all years, in keeping with the specialist status of the school. Even so the school has recently undertaken a curriculum review with a view to improving its provision over the next academic year, particularly in English, MFL and ICT. The Key Stage 3 curriculum covers the full requirements of the National Curriculum. There is a good range of creative arts and many students take two languages in Years 8 and 9, including the choice of Latin. All students take a common core of subjects at Key Stage 4 and select from a wide range of options. Information and communication technology (ICT) will be taken by all students as a certificated short GCSE course. The curriculum is well suited to many of the average and higher attaining students but does not fully meet the needs of all students. Health and social care is offered as an option but there are not yet enough vocational courses that are open to all students. Twilight GCSE courses are offered in astronomy, French and music and an additional AS science course is planned for more able students. Nevertheless, presently there is no formal additional provision for the gifted and talented students across the school. There is a planned programme of personal and social education that includes citizenship and promotes students' awareness of health and safety. However, this is not taught consistently across the year groups and its effectiveness has not as yet been fully evaluated by the school. There are wide and varied opportunities for enrichment activities, particularly in music, drama, art and sport. Special events around the time of the inspection included an Evening of Dance, Musician of the Year, a Fashion Show and rehearsals for the Uganda concert. There are many sport clubs and team activities. The breadth of extra-curricular provision supports students well and adds considerable enjoyment to their school experience. In the sixth form the curriculum is good but there is no organised programme for general studies, physical education or recreational activities. The full range of extra-curricular activities is available as well as extensive opportunities for taking responsibility within and beyond the school community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of care was considered by the school as outstanding throughout, but was judged by inspectors as good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Pastoral care is outstanding. Student-teacher relationships are good and students are extremely confident that staff listen to their personal problems and do all they can to

help to solve them. However, students would appreciate a greater voice in general school matters. Parents are very positive about all aspects of the school and are now much more involved in the education and care of their children. Heads of Year are enthusiastically extending their pastoral role so that they have a clearer overview of the academic progress of the students, but the systems to check how each student is getting on have still to be fully established. Students with additional learning needs are well supported, particularly when given specialist help out of lessons. In lessons teachers are not all sufficiently adept at making sure their teaching matches the different pace of learning for each student. The school has good first aid and welfare systems. Child protection systems are fully in place. Health and safety procedures are effective so students are safe and secure while in the school's care.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are good. The new headteacher has introduced a refreshing and exciting vision for continuous improvement in the school. Parents, teachers and governors greatly respect and share her clearly focused approach to the promotion of very good standards of behaviour, good levels of care and high attainment for all students. The newly formed leadership team is working well with the staff to move the school forward. The effectiveness of the school's self evaluation is good and clearly identifies key areas for development. Staff and governors are now increasingly involved in setting the direction of the school. The school development plan has been rewritten to highlight priorities, monitor progress and measure outcomes. Middle management is generally good, although there is a lack of consistency in the use of assessment information and the monitoring of teaching in order to improve students' performance. Lesson observations have recently been started and this has led to a clearer emphasis on improving the standard of teaching and learning across the school. The school runs smoothly and calmly on a day-to-day basis. It is effective in recruiting specialist teachers and there is a good programme of professional development. Performance management is well established for teachers although the school has not renewed its 'Investors in People' status. Staffing has been restructured and additional support staff have been employed to promote students' achievement. All teachers now have laptops and there are ambitious strategic plans for the further use of ICT as a learning tool in the school. The governing body brings much valuable expertise to the school and is quietly effective in discharging its statutory responsibilities. Governors are well informed of the school's progress and have a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Their planning and monitoring roles have been strengthened. They are very supportive of the headteacher and staff, and work in a spirit of trust to further improve the school. The school has addressed nearly all the issues raised in the last inspection. There is good capacity for further improvement in the school.

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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	1
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?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
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	1	
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	1
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?	2	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	1
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	2	
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	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

It was very good to meet so many of you during the inspection and listen to the many positive things you had to say about your school. Thank you for your participation in the work of the inspection team. We judged that the school is highly effective with many outstanding features. It is justly well regarded by you, its students, and your parents. The senior staff know what the school does well, and why, and what they need to do to make it even better in the future. You as students, whatever your starting points, make good progress. Those of you in the sixth form achieve particularly well. We were impressed by the orderly and tranquil environment for learning that we saw in most lessons and around the school. We know that there are a small number of students who challenge teachers and disrupt the learning of others, but we are also aware of what the school is doing to combat this and feel this should have everyone's strong support. Good teaching and learning contribute to your development. We are impressed by the wide variety of activities which goes on outside lessons. We know that the extensive set of activities going on in the week of the inspection was typical. We consider that the school is well managed and that under the spirited leadership of your new headteacher the school has a very strong capacity to improve further. We have said to the school that in order to improve it needs to: - Improve the way the school keeps data on your academic performance, and uses it to monitor and help you achieve. - Share good practice among teachers so that so that their teaching is all outstanding. - Develop a more coherent approach to the teaching of personal, social and health education. - In the sixth form develop a programme which encompasses general studies and recreational activities. The inspection team wish you well with your studies and your futures.