



Highbury Grove School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 100452
Local Authority Islington
Inspection number 285799
Inspection dates 29–30 January 2007
Reporting inspector Meena Wood HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Highbury New Park
School category	Community		London
Age range of pupils	11–18		N5 2EG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	020 7288 8900
Number on roll (school)	1142	Fax number	020 7288 8910
Number on roll (6th form)	150		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Steve Arnold
		Headteacher	Ms Truda White
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	29–30 January 2007	285799

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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

Highbury Grove School specialises in business and enterprise studies. Boys significantly outnumber girls. Over half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Well over half of the pupils have been assessed with learning difficulties, disabilities (including statements), literacy, dyslexia or language needs. A sizeable proportion of pupils have English as an additional language. The school draws over half of its pupils from Black Caribbean, Black African and Bangladeshi groups and about one third of pupils from Turkish and other minority ethnic groups.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Highbury Grove School has improved significantly in the last five years and now provides a good education in most respects for its pupils. Since the last inspection, a relentless focus on pupils' very poor behaviour and achievement has been successful and resulted in marked improvements. Pupils make good progress and standards have improved considerably from a very low base in Years 9 and 11 and are now below national averages and improving. The senior leadership team and staff have successfully created an inclusive environment, where pupils of all abilities and cultural backgrounds learn well together. As some pupils reported, 'I enjoy coming to school because we have fun things to do in lessons and learn at the same time!' One parent of a very able pupil reported, 'My son was bored at primary school and now my son is in Year 9, I have not once doubted our decision to send him to Highbury Grove!'

Managers, teachers, patrol officers and others have worked successfully with pupils to develop satisfactory codes of behaviour in classes and around the school and external exclusions have decreased significantly. Pupils report that they feel safe and secure in school, and they can readily turn to staff and peer mentors. Attendance is satisfactory, although unauthorised absence is still a concern, especially in Year 11. The school works very effectively with external agencies and parents to prevent pupils from becoming disaffected and to support pupils' very wide ranging pastoral, emotional and behavioural needs. A good pastoral system that includes an extended support team effectively addresses the needs of all pupils, and especially those who are vulnerable. Teaching and learning are satisfactory for pupils in Years 7–11 and good in the sixth form. Not all teachers focus sufficiently on developing the language and literacy skills and subject knowledge of the high proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those with literacy/language needs. However, pupils benefit greatly from the four 'nurture' groups, additional revision classes, out of class support and extra curricular activities. These are making a good impact on pupils' achievement.

Changes in the curriculum have widened choice for pupils and increasing numbers now progress to the sixth form, further education and training. As a specialist business enterprise school, there are extensive and productive links with business partners that have contributed to the diverse range of enjoyable extra curricular and other learning experiences. These contribute well to pupils' personal and emotional development and their achievement.

The head teacher has accurately identified the school's strengths and knows where it still needs to improve. However, self evaluation has not sufficiently prioritised raising standards in teaching and learning, and monitoring procedures have not addressed the variable quality of teaching across the school. Since the last inspection the school has made notable improvements and its capacity to improve is very good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school has an open access policy and standards in the sixth form are in line with the national average, whilst achievement is good. The school is part of a sixth form consortium with two local secondary schools. Pupils can choose subjects from an extensive range of GCE A level and vocational options. Pupils' personal development is good and they communicate confidently. The tutoring system prepares pupils well for higher education or employment. They feel well supported and some were quick to comment that 'teachers are always willing to help'. Pupils willingly take on additional responsibilities such as contributing to main school assemblies, for instance through a play on the impact of racism, crime and bullying. However, a number of pupils believe that the consortium school council does not always offer them sufficient opportunities to make a greater contribution to their school.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, monitor pupils' progress carefully and make them aware of how to improve. Lessons are well-planned and creative and pupils are keen to learn although, in some cases, teachers miss opportunities to help pupils develop their critical thinking and independent learning skills.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The consortium has, however, experienced some difficulties with its overall management but the steering committee is effectively addressing this situation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching, learning and support in lessons for those pupils with learning difficulties, disabilities, literacy and language needs
- Ensure greater rigour by all managers in self-evaluation, analysis and monitoring of data to drive improvements

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most pupils are working at levels which are well below the national average when they enter Year 7. All pupils make considerably good progress between Years 7 to 9, but this declines to satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. However, overall pupils' progress between Years 7 to 11 is good. There are some slight variations in progress of groups of pupils between Years 7 to 11, but no pupil makes less than satisfactory progress and the school has worked hard to improve the progress of underachieving groups. In 2006 the largest minority ethnic groups, Black Caribbean and Turkish, as well as White pupils improved their progress. Somali and Bangladeshi pupils did not improve their progress as much. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those at an early stage of learning English make satisfactory progress.

Standards, although considerably improved, are still below national average in English, mathematics and science in Year 9. By the end of Year 11 in 2006, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE A*-C and the proportion of pupils who achieve five or more GCSE A*-G have significantly improved but remain below national average. However, for pupils achieving five or more GCSE A*-C including mathematics and English, pupils' standards have not improved as significantly and are low. The rates of improvement over the last four years for all GCSE standards are higher than the national picture. This is due in part to the largely good teaching in Years 7 to 9, 'nurture groups' and the very successful implementation of additional revision and catch up classes that support all pupils' learning outside the lessons.

Pupils' pass rates for individual GCSE subjects show variation. In 2006, pupils performed best in art and design, drama, geography and ICT GNVQ than all other subjects. Girls' standards have improved at a faster rate than that of boys.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils demonstrated good awareness of other cultures and high standards of work on 'Rosa Parks', 'History of Brazil's African Heritage' and 'Arabic Calligraphy'. Themed assemblies enable pupils to reflect on moral, spiritual and contemporary issues. The majority of pupils are mature, polite and helpful and enjoy coming to school. At the previous inspection there was some significantly poor behaviour. Behaviour is now satisfactory and in many cases, good. If bullying occurs, it is quickly resolved either through school systems or with the help of peer mentors. A group of Year 10 peer mentors received a national award for their anti-bullying project and a group of Year 8 pupils recently performed a stimulating play 'Box Clever', as part of an anti-bullying campaign. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own actions. For example, pupils initiated the redecoration of part of the school environment. Through the school council and their work in lessons, pupils have good opportunities to develop their citizenship skills and contribute well to the wider community through fund raising events. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles. Attendance is broadly satisfactory, however a significant minority of pupils across the year groups, and in particular in Years 10 and 11, take unauthorised absence. The school has rightly recognised that it needs to monitor and track attendance and punctuality much more rigorously. Preparation for pupils' economic well-being is satisfactory; they learn excellent finance, business and team-building skills through a range of enterprise activities, such as the Year 7 business project 'running a bank'. However, pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Although teachers share the objectives of lessons and assessment criteria with pupils, planning in a significant number of lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11, does not always take sufficient account of the low ability range and literacy and language learning needs of pupils. In the better lessons, teachers ask questions that check pupils' learning, encourage discussion, and set activities that encourage group and pair work. Where pupils enjoy lessons, this is because they are well planned and pupils' individual progress is assessed carefully. In one lesson in Year 8, pupils thoroughly enjoyed the production line team challenge 'Roof Stixx', where they competed to build a roof and developed good team working skills.

Where lessons are successful, activities enable pupils to work at their own pace and ability and extension tasks challenge those of higher ability. Teachers give regular feedback, encourage peer evaluation and appropriately use praise to motivate individuals. There is greater evidence of these aspects of good teaching in Years 7 and 8 and in the sixth form than in Years 10 and 11. For example, in one Year 12 art and design lesson, the teacher successfully demonstrated David Hockney's 'Splash' painting techniques, inspiring pupils to use these in their own work.

In some lessons, the pace of work is inappropriate, often with the teacher talking too much and not providing well structured activities for the least able pupils to help them understand subject concepts and to develop effective literacy, language and numeracy skills. Where teaching assistants are present in lessons, pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with language and literacy needs are supported well. However, in their absence, the work is not planned well enough to enable pupils to learn independently. Marking of pupils' work is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 but variable in Years 10 and 11, where pupil absence, combined with inconsistent completion of class and homework, leads to gaps in pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. Managing changes in the school's curriculum has widened choice for pupils and led to increased achievement and progression to the sixth form, university, further education and training. In Years 10 and 11, pupils can choose from academic and vocational subjects or a work related learning option through a 'pathways' system. The school recognises that it needs to develop a greater choice of vocational subjects that will prepare pupils even better for post 16 transition. A minority of pupils follow NVQ courses in hairdressing, construction, and car mechanics in a local college for three days a week. A good feature of the curriculum is the supported move between

primary and secondary school in Year 7 to Year 9 and the small 'nurture' groups that support less able pupils and those with a range of needs.

The school's specialist status in business and enterprise has attracted the support of national and local firms in activities that enrich teaching and learning significantly. For instance, sponsorship from city accounting and law firms supports enterprise days, a school bank and successful Young Enterprise companies.

The provision of ICT has greatly improved, but pupils still need greater access to computers across the curriculum, for instance, in modern foreign languages. The curriculum is enriched through several after-school clubs including sports, music, drama and mathematics. A quiet 'reading period' in tutor groups as part of the literacy strategy has helped pupils greatly. The extended school provision is an outstanding feature and includes an extensive Friday afternoon programme, a Saturday school, revision classes and a breakfast club. As part of this, classes for parents, located on school premises in the City Learning Centre, focus on parenting skills, English for Speakers Of Languages, literacy and ICT skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of care and guidance provided by the school is good. The school has gained a national social inclusion award for the care of vulnerable pupils. These pupils are very well supported and make satisfactory progress. Requirements for child protection and police checks on all staff are in place and suitable risk assessments are undertaken. The school works effectively with external agencies to support pupils' pastoral needs.

The school uses data on pupils' academic performance to produce individual and subject targets that help pupils understand the level they are working at. However, teachers do not consistently inform pupils how they can improve the standards of their work, particularly in the core subjects. Good support is provided in small groups for pupils with learning difficulties, language needs and disabilities, for example, through the Year 7 nurture classes.

A supportive internal exclusions process removes disruptive pupils from lessons to another place of study where they receive individually monitored tuition and support. Most re-enter their classes and behave better. This has significantly diminished the previous high levels of fixed term and permanent exclusions and has greatly encouraged those pupils at risk of dropping out of school to remain in school and continue with their studies. The careers programme advises pupils well on their future training and career options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection the head teacher has been firmly committed to improving standards in the school and has risen to the challenge by steering through some fundamental changes. The school has put in place excellent intervention strategies. These have significantly improved pupils' behaviour and attendance from a very low base and raised achievement and standards for the majority of pupils. The school is continuing to address the concerns of a minority of parents who have concerns about pupils' behaviour, some recent thefts and safety on school premises. Governors effectively support the school through well focused assistance with financial planning and more recently, with the accommodation strategy that will enable school buildings to be extended and refurbished. The head teacher and her senior leadership team have rightly given high priority to literacy intervention strategies, more focused target setting and monitoring of pupils' progress and this has started to benefit pupils, and has been particularly successful in Years 7-9. As part of school reviews, managers and teachers are involved in well planned professional staff development sessions and a recent project which is designed to raise teachers' awareness of implementing literacy strategies. Within the school improvement plan, the head teacher has prioritised professional capacity building for her staff. Through leadership training for her managers, she has recognised that her senior and middle managers need to take greater responsibility in analysing and monitoring more carefully the use of data and reports, in order to drive up standards and achievement further.

The school is aware of its strengths, and has identified most of the areas it needs to develop further. However, self evaluation and monitoring procedures have not sufficiently addressed the variable quality of teaching across pupil year groups and subjects and the need to deploy teaching assistants more effectively across the curriculum.

The school is aware that Black Caribbean pupils are disproportionately excluded from some lessons and through its well thought out equality and diversity strategies and focus on minority ethnic attainment, is beginning to address this issue.

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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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	3	

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?	2	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 to below 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	3	
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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Following our recent visit to inspect your school, we would like to thank you for your contributions to the inspection. We enjoyed sitting in your lessons, talking with you and looking at your work. I am now writing to let you know about our findings. Your school is a good school. The headteacher and staff have worked hard with you to improve the progress you make in your lessons. The standards you reached in examinations in Year 9 and in Year 11, have improved as a result. You have a good choice of vocational and academic courses, and this helps many of you to progress successfully to the sixth form, further education and training. Those of you attending the sixth form are also making good progress and can choose from a wide range of subjects. As pupils in a business and enterprise school, you all benefit from a varied range of enjoyable extra curricular activities that help you develop broader skills. The behaviour we observed in classes and around the school was much improved from the last inspection and is now satisfactory, and in some cases, very good.

We have identified some areas where the school can improve.

- All your teachers need to ensure that they plan better structured lessons that help all of you to develop good standards of reading, writing and mathematics, make greater progress and achieve good results in your subjects.
- The headteacher and the managers of the school need to make sure they monitor more closely what is happening in lessons and other activities.

You can help your teachers and managers through attending more regularly, not playing truant, behaving even better in the lessons and around school and completing your class and homework. We hope that you will all do well in the future and with the help of the school realise your ambitions.

Yours sincerely,

Meena Wood
Her Majesty's Inspector