



Rainhill High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104830
Local Authority St. Helens
Inspection number 287047
Inspection dates 21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector Eric Craven HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Warrington Road
School category	Community		Rainhill, Prescot
Age range of pupils	11–18		Merseyside L35 6NY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01744 677205
Number on roll (school)	1383	Fax number	01744 677206
Number on roll (6th form)	186		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Cllr Mike Doyle
		Headteacher	Mr John Pout
Date of previous school inspection	24 February 2003		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	21–22 February 2007	287047

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by [insert number] of Her Majesty's Inspectors, [insert number] Additional Inspectors and [insert number] Child Care Inspectors.

Description of the school

Rainhill High School Media Arts College is a larger than average secondary school. It is fully subscribed and three-quarters of the students come from primary schools in the local areas of Rainhill, Eccleston Park and Nutgrove. The remaining students come from a neighbouring local authority. The percentage of students receiving free school meals is about half the national average. The school has very few students from minority ethnic groups and there are very few who are in public care. There is an increasing number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) although this figure remains below the national average. The school achieved Media Arts College status in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The new senior leadership team is making a real difference at this improving school. Staff are increasingly focused on raising the rate of progress made by the students. The systems introduced to do this are beginning to have impact although in some cases they have not been evaluated thoroughly enough.

Achievement is satisfactory as most students make adequate progress given their starting points when they join Year 7, including those who have LDD. At Key Stage 3 students achieve very well in science and are doing increasingly well in mathematics. But in English too few make the progress of which they are capable. By the time they leave school in Year 11, the most recent results show that students reach broadly average standards, reflecting their level of attainment when they started school. Nevertheless, there is variation between results in different subjects and between some groups of students, including the most able. Recently established arrangements for setting targets and checking on students' progress, as well as improvements to the curriculum, are helping to improve the standards reached by students.

The personal development of the students is good. The popularity of the school, good rates of attendance, satisfactory behaviour and good participation in after-school clubs confirm the students' view that they enjoy going to school. However, there are a small number of parents who have concerns about behaviour. The quality of teaching is mixed: it ranges from outstanding to inadequate. Overall it is satisfactory. The curriculum has improved and is good, with two particularly impressive features. The school's Media Arts College status has impacted positively on the curriculum by expanding the number and type of courses offered as well as the range of topics studied in existing courses. The school's extra-curricular provision and enrichment programmes are outstanding and greatly valued by the students. Students are well cared for and there is a strong commitment from the school to ensure their safety and health. Students are particularly well aware of the importance of leading healthy lifestyles.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory but with a number of good elements. The headteacher, ably supported by other senior leaders, is leading the school well. The senior leadership team operate effectively as a closely knit group and share a vision for the school which has been shared with the school community.

Arrangements for identifying underachievement are improving and staff are increasingly being held to account for the students' progress. The governing body provide good support and healthy challenge to the school's leaders and managers. Although there are some strengths in the management of the school there are also some weaknesses. The focus on raising achievement could be strengthened further by ensuring that the impact of actions in the school development plan are measured against students' achievements. Greater use could be made of performance data and evaluation of the school's work could be more systematic. Senior leaders have provided clear guidance to heads of department on auditing effectiveness of departments and assisted them in compiling subject action plans. Middle managers perform their roles satisfactorily

overall, although their effectiveness varies. Some inconsistencies in aspects of departments' work, monitoring of planning for example, reflect a lack of clarity in the expectations placed upon them.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth Form provision is good and has improved since the last inspection. There has been a rising trend in achievement over the past three years. Those students who completed advanced level courses in 2005 and 2006 achieved well when compared with students of similar abilities in other schools or colleges. There is, however, some underachievement at AS level. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The recently appointed Director of Sixth Form is providing strong leadership and has a clear vision for future improvement. New policies and practices are having a positive impact on recruitment and retention and are beginning to impact on the further raising of achievement. There has been considerable investment in accommodation and resources and this, together with improving achievement, is making the school sixth form more attractive for students of all abilities. The school offers a good range of subjects at advanced level and is expanding the curriculum provision in line with student demand. There is limited provision of vocational courses but these are readily available at neighbouring colleges. Opportunities for enrichment through after-school clubs, sporting activities, music, drama and cultural visits are extensive. Students appreciate the good teaching and good learning environment in the sixth form. Very good relationships exist between students and teachers. Student attendance levels are very high and students appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. They receive good guidance before selecting their courses and benefit from good care, support and guidance systems during their time in the sixth form. Students are set challenging targets, based on prior attainment at GCSE, and progress towards those targets is checked regularly. The school recognises that the use of performance data to identify strengths and weaknesses in provision needs further development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards so that all students achieve well, particularly in English at Key Stage 3 and in the weaker performing subjects at GCSE and AS level.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that more of it is good or better by ensuring work is tailored to meet the interests and abilities of different groups of students.
- Ensure that evaluation of the school's work is strategically planned and systematic.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Attainment on entry to the school varies a little year on year, but the students who left school in 2005 entered the school with broadly average levels of attainment in the core subjects. Key Stage 3 results are

improving and generally have been above average for the last three years. In 2006, the students achieved their best ever results in mathematics and science, with a considerable number of students achieving the higher Level 6 or above. Results in English were less positive, however, and too many students failed to achieve the level expected. At Key Stage 4, results have remained at similar levels in recent years, with an average proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. Almost all students leave school with five or more GCSE passes and very few leave with no qualifications at all. However, too many students do not achieve A* to C grades in all of their subjects. In 2006, the best results at GCSE were in English, drama and media studies, science and geography. Results were weaker in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), music, food technology, business studies and history. This variation means that students do not always reach the high standards of which they are capable. Girls did better than boys, as is the case nationally. Students now in Year 9 and 11, and in the other years, are making at least adequate progress in most subjects. This is because senior managers are placing an increased emphasis on setting challenging targets and checking that students are making enough progress. Students who have LDD also make adequate progress in relation to their starting points. Other groups, including those in public care and from minority ethnic backgrounds, do at least as well as similar students nationally and minority ethnic students do as well as the other students in the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development is good and supports their learning well. The school places great emphasis on boosting their confidence and raising self-esteem through a culture of celebrating achievement and praise. As a result students generally display positive attitudes to their learning. Students have a good spiritual, moral and social awareness and display a strong understanding of themselves and their place in the wider world, for example, through studying poetry from different countries and by celebrating achievements and diversity in other cultures. They make a positive contribution to the community as they are well aware of the needs of those less fortunate than themselves, enthusiastically raising funds for charities through eager participation in 'health' and 'one world' days. Behaviour around the school is satisfactory overall and sometimes better, but there is some disruption in lessons from a small minority of learners, especially where lessons are uninspiring. Students' feel safe from harassment and they say bullying is infrequent:

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although the quality of teaching ranges from outstanding to inadequate. In the most successful lessons teachers with good subject knowledge focus on what students are to learn. They use a variety of creative strategies that enthuse students and meet their range of needs, interests and abilities. Good assessment of students' progress also occurs throughout, and at the end of, these lessons. Teachers use interactive white boards well. Their questions reinforce and develop understanding and they encourage students to use technical vocabulary in their responses. In the best lessons all students, including those with LDD, make good or better progress, are motivated and behave well. In the less successful lessons activities lack variety and do not meet students' needs, challenge them or capture their interest enough. There is too much teacher talk and a lack of clarity about what the learning outcomes for students are. As a result students make limited progress in their learning, display a lack enthusiasm, and some behaviour deteriorates when teachers do not manage it effectively. The school has improving systems in place to monitor, and to improve, the quality of teaching and learning. However, impact on students' achievement has been limited because lesson monitoring has not focused enough on learning and the extensive training received by staff is yet to be translated into good or better lessons for all.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good with some outstanding elements. Media Arts status has had a positive impact on curriculum provision at the school. A wider range of subjects is available for Key Stage 4 students and a wider variety of creative activities are delivered through a number of subjects throughout the school. All Year 10 students have a compulsory Media Arts option. ICT resources have been substantially improved as a result of specialist status and this has benefited all subject areas, as well as encouraging a more varied approach to teaching and learning. A greater variety of media and arts related activities has helped to enhance the student's social, spiritual and cultural development, which is good. The needs of students with LDD are met through the work of core departments and by the Raising Achievement Centre, which provides effective and intensive support to raise literacy and numeracy skills. There is a comprehensive citizenship and life skills programme which suitably includes aspects of education for health and safety. There is an excellent extra-curricular and enrichment programme, available to all students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. Students are well supported, feel safe and enjoy school. Relationships between teachers and students are friendly. Staff are approachable and students are confident that any concerns are listened to and swiftly acted upon. The school is becoming increasingly assured in using new systems for setting targets and for checking on the progress of students. The school attends carefully to the needs of its vulnerable students and provides good personal support and guidance. The Raising Achievement Centre is a haven for those experiencing difficulties with their learning, concentrating on raising their attainment and self-confidence. Learning mentors provide effective support for students who require additional academic help. Well established links with outside agencies mean that additional assistance for pupils is secured when needed. A comprehensive induction programme helps new students in Year 7 and Year 12 to settle in. The advice to students about their future careers, and information about further study, meets their needs well. Procedures for health and safety, child protection and risk assessments are thorough and checks on the suitability of all adults to work in school are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and senior leaders are successfully developing a culture of self-review, with a clear focus on achievement, although there is more to do to ensure that the benefits of this work is fully realised. The headteacher is tenacious in his pursuit of improvement and has introduced arrangements to appropriately hold managers and other staff to account whilst offering suitable guidance and support where necessary. The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis as systems are readily understood by the students. Middle managers are, in the main, accepting the challenge laid down by the senior staff but there is strain for some as new arrangements are becoming established and expectations are clarified, for example in having to manage both academic and pastoral issues in their subject areas. School self-review involves students, parents, staff and governors. However, evaluation of the school's work is insufficiently systematic and this limits the extent of the school's understanding of its effectiveness. Middle managers undertake reviews of their departments and form action plans but these do not contain success criteria based on student achievement and this hampers measuring progress. Governance of the school is good. Governors are supportive and committed to the school and are well led by an experienced chair of governors. They ensure they are well informed through the reports they receive and through links to departments and senior staff. This puts them in a good position to ask well informed questions of the school's leaders. The recent introduction of a governors' termly monitoring sheet has been very helpful. The majority of parents who responded to

the parental survey are supportive of the school and recognise its strengths, although there is a small proportion who disagree that students' behaviour is good. The school has successfully tackled the issues for improvement from the last inspection and this, allied to increasingly strong leadership, means that the capacity to improve further is good.

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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 effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
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?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
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	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	2
The behaviour of learners	3	2
The attendance of learners	2	1
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	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?	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	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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

Thank you for the welcome you gave myself and my colleagues when we inspected your school earlier this week. Particular thanks to those students who met with Mr Isherwood, Ms Nelson-Rowe and Mr Loach when they gathered your views of the school.

Rainhill High is an improving school and the work of the headteacher and senior managers is beginning to bear fruit although there is still more to do to improve achievements and standards in order to move them from being satisfactory to good. Therefore we judged the school's effectiveness to be satisfactory. However, we identified some strengths, some of which you also told us about.

- Care, guidance and support you receive is good and relationships between yourselves and staff are generally strong.
- The curriculum has improved and is now good and the impact of the Media Arts status is very evident in the curriculum.
- The range of extra-curricular activities available and the school's enrichment programme are impressive.
- Your personal development is good overall: you are extremely well aware of healthy lifestyles (although a few more of you could choose healthy options at lunchtime); you told us emphatically that you enjoy the school; you are helped to make a good contribution to the life of the school; and your rate of attendance is good and notably high in the sixth form.
- The sixth form has improved and we judge it to be good.

We found that the quality of teaching to be satisfactory overall. The staff are working hard at improving teaching through training and lesson observations, but this hasn't improved teaching quite enough yet. Leadership and management of the school was also judged to be satisfactory although we recognise the strengths of the headteacher and senior staff who have made necessary changes at the school and given it a clear direction for the future. Behaviour was also judged to be satisfactory, rather than good, as there were a small number of pupils who caused disruptions in some lessons.

To improve things further we have asked the school to focus on.

- Improving standards particularly in some subjects.
- Improving the quality of teaching by ensuring work is tailored to meet the interests and abilities of different groups of students.
- Making sure that checks on the effectiveness of the school's work become a more regular practice.

Thank you again for the welcome you gave to the inspectors and good wishes for the future.