

Parrs Wood High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105556
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	287263
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Leszek Iwaskow HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	2022
6th form	493
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Geraldine Lyte
Headteacher	Mr David Ashley
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2001
School address	Wilmslow Road East Didsbury Manchester Greater Manchester M20 5PG
Telephone number	0161 445 8786
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Parrs Wood High School is a much larger than average secondary school and has a large sixth form. The school serves a wide range of communities in south Manchester. It is a popular school and is oversubscribed each year. In Years 7 to 11 boys outnumber girls. The school has an above average percentage of pupils and students who are entitled to free school meals. Almost a quarter speak English as an additional language. Attendance is broadly in line with national averages. The percentage of pupils and students with learning difficulties or disabilities is under half the national average, although the percentage of those who have a statement of special educational need is broadly in line with the national average.

Parrs Wood High School is a specialist performing arts and technology college. It has gained many awards, including the international schools award and Investors in People. It holds the football charter award and is also a leading-edge school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its students an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. The school provides unsatisfactory value for money.

Parrs Wood High School has experienced a period of uncertainty and change in recent years and during this time the school has made insufficient progress. Its difficulties have been related to: involvement in too many initiatives which are not making sufficient impact on learning in classrooms; frequent management restructuring; insufficient progress, especially in English and mathematics; poor achievement in Key Stage 3; complacency in some quarters; and a lack of clarity about the direction the school is taking.

The building's infrastructure is of a high standard and students and parents are proud of the school but are also concerned about the inconsistencies in many aspects of school life. The school acknowledges that participation in the two-year Key Stage 3 pilot has depressed results at the end of Key Stage 3 due, in part, to inappropriate consideration being given to the teaching approaches which should have been utilised. However, there are also issues with English and mathematics across the school, particularly over insufficient students attaining higher levels. The school's specialisms are also not having sufficient impact on raising standards across the curriculum.

The curriculum is satisfactory, meets statutory requirements and addresses the needs of most pupils. However, at Key Stage 3, the curriculum and subsequent teaching in English and mathematics in Years 7 and 8 have been insufficiently adapted to meet the requirements of the school's policy for entering most pupils for their statutory assessments at the end of Year 8.

Leadership and management are currently inadequate. The school does not demonstrate the capacity to improve. There is a lack of shared vision and little understanding of what needs to be done to make the most impact on provision. This has created a great deal of confusion at all levels and has led to inconsistency across many aspects of school life. There is limited accountability in many areas of management, reflecting the lack of clear guidance as to what the school's priorities are. Whereas some subject managers use their initiative to develop their areas others show less urgency and are not aware enough of what needs to be done to make things better. In some lessons, teachers are providing a satisfactory and even good experience for their pupils, but in others tasks are not sufficiently challenging or engaging. This concerns both parents and pupils.

Pupils are inquisitive, welcoming and very keen to share their views and experiences. They are generally well behaved, polite and feel safe in the school environment. A number expressed real concerns that some lessons are disrupted by the inattentiveness of their peers. They particularly enjoy those lessons where they can engage in practical and collaborative activities and also the many opportunities to participate in the wide range of sports and enrichment activities which the school offers.

The school is at a critical point in its development and there is a need to recognise that it has to focus on what really matters. Too much effort has been expended on becoming involved in initiatives or awards which have had limited impact on improving provision in the classroom.

Staff, governors and managers at all levels need to work together, agree priorities and a clear course of action if the school is to fulfil its undoubted potential.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form students achieve well and enjoy their learning as a result of relevant and interesting activities that build upon their previous knowledge and understanding. They make good progress in response to effective teaching, a wide curriculum and good opportunities to gain accreditation at both A and AS levels. Subject analysis and monitoring procedures are continuing to be developed to further strengthen achievement.

Students join the sixth form from other local schools and say that they are made to feel very welcome. A full programme of enrichment activities and work in the community enhances students' personal development, confidence and self-esteem. They are well cared for and supported and become articulate, confident and responsible young adults.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve leadership and management at all levels to ensure that provision is at least good in all areas.
- Raise standards and achievement, especially in Key Stage 3 and in English and mathematics.
- Ensure that teaching and learning are good across the whole school.
- Provide a curriculum that fully meets the needs of all pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is unsatisfactory. The school judges both standards and achievement to be satisfactory, but inspectors disagree, in particular, because of the exceptionally poor performance at Key Stage 3, where standards are well below those to be expected. The inclusion of the school in a national Key Stage 3 pilot has coincided with the significant fall in the proportion of students achieving the target Level 5 in English and mathematics. Insufficient progress was made in all core subjects in both 2006 and 2007.

At GCSE the proportion of pupils attaining five or more passes at grade C or above rose from 59% in 2005 to 71% in 2006, but fell in 2007 to 65%. However, lower than average progress was made in mathematics, from entry to school to the end of Key Stage 4, each year from 2004 to 2006, together with insufficient progress in English in both 2004 and 2006. Given that pupils enter the school at age 11 with standards that are broadly in line with those found nationally, this does not represent satisfactory progress in these core subjects. The school acknowledges these issues of underperformance at both key stages.

Girls make better progress than boys and pupils who speak English as a second language make good progress. Those with learning difficulties or disabilities performed satisfactorily. All pupils leave school with an approved qualification. They performed best in business studies, combined science (double award), communication studies and drama. Results in design and technology were weak, indicating that the school's specialism has had limited impact.

Students make good progress in the sixth form and current standards of work are good. Many achieve well and gain entrance to chosen career paths. New procedures for monitoring subjects

have contributed to better than average examination results, although there remain some variations across subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. However, the use of tutor time is inconsistent in effectively fostering this across the 'mini schools'. This is a new structure of vertical, mixed age tutor groups which has replaced the former pastoral system based on year groups. Pupils have a satisfactory awareness of healthy eating and lifestyles and most take good advantage of the excellent sporting facilities available. However, they do not always choose the healthy options in the canteen and a small minority bring unhealthy snacks such as crisps and fizzy drinks to school.

Most pupils feel safe. New procedures, such as sixth-formers wearing identity badges, have yet to have an impact. Pupils identified that bullying is not an issue.

Behaviour is satisfactory or better in most lessons. However, low-level disruption in some lessons is a concern of both parents and pupils. The new 'behaviour for learning' policy is beginning to be successful but is used inconsistently. There are a small number of incidents of inappropriate behaviour in the corridors. Although the exclusion rate is still high, the isolation unit and especially 'the base' have reduced this.

Pupils generally enjoy being in school. Levels of attendance have declined and remain below the national average. This is now being monitored more rigorously through the mini schools but this initiative has been in place for too short a period of time for the impact to be judged. Punctuality has improved. Pupils feel they are involved in the life of the school but express a desire to become more involved. The 'student leadership team' has had some impact in the past but has yet to be re-constituted for this academic year. Both pupils and sixth-form students benefit from work experience.

Students' personal development in the sixth form is good. Their attitudes and behaviour are good and, although they come from a diverse range of schools, there is a strong community spirit being engendered.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Most teachers' subject knowledge is good and relationships with students in the classroom are generally positive. Pupils' learning is best when the teaching challenges them through the pace of work, good questioning techniques and activities that encourage independent thinking, creativity and practical activity.

There is good practice, but this is inconsistent across the school. There is little clear understanding of pupils' different learning styles and lesson planning does not always consider how those of differing abilities can all achieve their best. As a result, pupils are not always set sufficiently challenging tasks. Some of the more able are upset about 'not being pushed' towards As and A*s and there is lack of challenge in some lessons. The continuing participation in a

national pilot scheme for an accelerated course of study for pupils in Years 7 and 8 is unsuccessful and is having a detrimental impact on progress. This is because lessons do not consistently provide the required high levels of pace and challenge to help these younger pupils cope with the demands of the accelerated course.

In some lessons, low-level misbehaviour hinders the progress of learning. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, it is characterised by lack of coherent structure and pace with tasks that do not match students' needs. The use of the techniques promoted through 'assessment for learning' is inconsistent across the school. The school's specialisms are not enhancing the quality of learning and teaching across the school. Pupils and parents are concerned about the impact of teachers' absences on learning. Work set in the independent learning centre is often mundane and repeats previous learning. Too much of it does not help pupils to make progress. There are also inconsistencies in the quality and frequency in which homework is set across the school.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good, as a consequence of good relationships and lesson planning that develops students' independent thinking and confidence to attempt demanding activities. Students are being challenged more than in the main school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Inspectors agree with the school that the curriculum is satisfactory, meets statutory requirements and addresses the needs of most pupils. However, at Key Stage 3, the curriculum and subsequent teaching in English and mathematics in Years 7 and 8 have been insufficiently adapted to meet the requirements of the school's policy for entering most pupils for their statutory assessments at the end of Year 8. As a consequence, their levels of achievement are poor. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is based on a choice of pathways, several of which incorporate vocationally related courses, either in school or through attendance at college. All pupils follow one of three courses in the technology specialism. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is in place, with pupils gaining qualifications at the end of Year 10. There is less specific provision in Year 11.

Policies for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum have recently been updated. Currently these aspects remain inconsistently embedded across the school. There is provision for work-related learning in all key stages. There is some collaborative development between technology and the second specialism of performing arts, the school's second specialism, but technology makes less impact on other subject areas. The range and choice of extra-curricular activities are a strength of the school, one that is much appreciated by pupils and parents. Gifted and talented pupils also benefit from a range of enrichment activities, as do those pupils, particularly sixth-formers, who participate in the extensive international links that the school has established.

The development of an open sixth-form provision has enabled students to choose from a wide range of academic courses suited to their interests. There are effective systems to support them. Students are encouraged to stay on to the sixth form but, where the school is unable to offer certain specialist pathways, they are guided well towards suitable alternatives within the network of partner institutions. These reciprocal arrangements work well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory: this is because the school has recognised and started to tackle some of its shortcomings. Safeguarding procedures are in place.

The work of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is carefully tracked and strategies are in place to enable them to make progress. Parents of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities in Year 11 are well informed about the progress of their children. Training and support are provided for new staff but a lack of systematic monitoring means the impact of this is unknown.

The newly introduced mini-schools are beginning to enhance the care, guidance and support in Year 11 and have improved the monitoring and tracking of pupils' academic progress. However, a demonstrable impact is not yet evident in other year groups where monitoring is weak. Parents and pupils believe that some of the mini-schools are beginning to prove successful, especially with regard to communication. To an extent inspectors agree, but inconsistencies also remain in terms of their management and the pace of implementation.

Parents are worried about the lack of homework and the inspectors agree with them. Little homework, the inconsistent marking of books and the poor advice about what to do to improve work, mean pupils do not meet challenging targets. Some pupils are not aware of their targets.

The school provides sound careers guidance and work experience. Students appreciate the good support for the transition between Year 11 and sixth-form providers. The sixth-form students appreciate the advice and support they are given: one described the staff as 'amazing'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's leadership and management are inadequate. It is not demonstrating the capacity required to deal effectively with urgent issues such as underachievement in Key Stage 3, insufficient progress in GCSE English and a declining trend in attendance. There is too much variation in too many areas of the school's work and in its results at GCSE. The pace of change and improvement is too slow, following an extended phase of turmoil at senior leadership level which the school acknowledges was, 'a period of leadership instability'. Consequently, improvement initiatives are not embedding effectively.

Although there is a consensus in the school that standards should be higher, there is no agreed and collective sense of priorities about how to drive forward improvement. Initiatives intended to achieve improvements are mainly ineffective because their introduction lacks clarity and their implementation lacks consistency. Management systems lack continuity or accountability. There have been too many changes in arrangements for line management and in the coordination of important whole-school issues such as literacy, numeracy and ICT. There is confusion over new initiatives: for example, there is a lack of clarity among some faculty leaders about how to carry out their role within the recently introduced mini-school structure.

The school's self-evaluation is weak. It does not provide a consistently precise analysis of strengths and weaknesses in key areas of the school's work, such as teaching and learning. Its estimation of the school's effectiveness is not justified by the varied outcomes achieved by students. Procedures to support planning for improvement lack coherence. There is no effective whole-school development plan for the current year so faculty leaders do not have a detailed, coherent framework to support planning for their areas. Subject plans do not consistently include hard-edged criteria to help subject leaders assess how effective their efforts are.

The recently established governing body is forming a clearer view of where improvements are needed and is setting up better structures to enable it to challenge the school's leadership more effectively. The school has a budget deficit and, given the inadequate achievement, is failing to provide value for money. The school's specialism is not making sufficient impact on raising standards. In the sixth form, effective and consistent management over a period of time have ensured that funding is better spent. This has resulted in better outcomes and a clearer understanding of strengths and weaknesses.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	4	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	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?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Parrs Wood High School, East Disbury, M20 5PG

Following our visit to inspect your school, I would like to tell you about the things the inspectors found. We have decided that your school needs to improve and we have placed it into 'special measures'. This means that, although your school does some things well, particularly in the sixth form, in some very important areas there are weaknesses, which we believe need to be sorted out quickly to make your stay in the school more rewarding.

The inspectors were made aware that the school has gone through a difficult period of management change, involvement in too many initiatives and frequent restructuring. This constant chopping and changing has not helped, particularly in the lower school, where results have been poor, especially in English and mathematics. Results need to improve and over the coming months your teachers will be working hard to bring about these improvements. You will also need to play your part by paying greater attention in lessons and not distracting others. For their part, the teachers are going to make many more of the tasks they set in lessons more challenging in order to make you really think. They will also set more relevant homework and ensure that you know what you must do to improve by making this clear when they mark your work.

We were impressed by your honesty, humour and keenness to make a success of your stay in the school. Many of you have high aspirations. Your sixth form is successful and thriving. We would like the rest of the school to be as successful as your sixth form.

You will not be surprised to learn that we have asked the school to improve the weaknesses identified above as quickly as possible. You and your teachers will be provided with help and support to carry out these improvements and inspectors will visit the school regularly to check the progress everyone is making. You, your teachers, parents and governors will all need to work together to ensure this happens. We wish you every success in the future.