



Holmfirth High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 107769
Local Authority Kirklees
Inspection number 287910
Inspection date 15 January 2007
Reporting inspector Anthony Briggs

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Heys Road
School category	Community		Thongsbridge, Holmfirth
Age range of pupils	11–16		West Yorkshire HD9 7SE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01484 691460
Number on roll (school)	1255	Fax number	01484 691469
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr David Taylor
		Headteacher	Dr Andy Williams
Date of previous school inspection	16 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–16	15 January 2007	287910

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Holmfirth High School is bigger than most secondary schools. Students are drawn from generally advantaged semi-rural areas. The school's population is stable, with slightly more boys than girls in most year groups. Almost all students are of White British heritage with a few from a range of minority ethnic groups. Nearly all students speak English fluently. Very few are eligible for free school meals. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school has specialist status in mathematics and computing and has achieved the Healthy Schools Award, Investors in People status, Artsmark and Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'This school is a friendly, fun and safe place to learn' and 'there are so many things to do outside lessons' are some of the reasons why students enjoy coming to Holmfirth High and achieve so well. Everything the school does is at least good and many aspects are exemplary. Consequently, inspectors confirm the school's view that it is providing an outstanding education for its students and provides excellent value for money. Standards are high and students' achievement is good because of consistently good teaching. Students are proud of their school. They like the way they all get on with each other and this is reflected in their excellent attendance. They feel exceptionally well cared for and value the fact that there is always somebody to share a problem with should they need to. Students are encouraged to be healthy through lots of exercise opportunities and improved food and drink choice. Regular polling of students' and parents' views has resulted in a school that listens to and acts upon the opinions of others. Parents really value the work of the school, one commenting: 'I am delighted with Holmfirth High school, the attitude of the staff is positive and enthusiastic.'

The outstanding curriculum has a range of innovative features that meet the needs of all students exceptionally well. It is enhanced by a stunning menu of extra-curricular activities that are cherished by the students. Teachers are experts in their subjects and pass their knowledge on very well to the students. Relationships are founded on mutual trust and respect, and as a result, students work extremely hard for their teachers. However, a few teachers do not use the wealth of available data rigorously enough to ensure that all students do as well as they can in every lesson. The impact of the specialist mathematics and computing status has developed strong links with partner primary schools and the local community. However, although the use of information technology is outstanding and has strengthened learning across the school, mathematics has not yet had quite as much impact on work in other subjects.

An outstanding school where students achieve well and feel safe and happy does not just happen by chance: it has to be skilfully managed from the top. The inspirational and exceptional leadership of the headteacher combined with the strengths of the other senior and middle managers has resulted in a shared vision that relentlessly drives the school forward. Governors fully understand where the school is going and how to get it there and it is this uniform approach from all managers that creates an excellent capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers make full use of the information about students' abilities when setting work so that all students achieve as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well. Students enter the school with standards that are above average and they leave with standards that are high. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards in English, mathematics and science overall have been consistently and significantly above the national average, albeit with a slight drop in tests results in English in 2006. Students make good progress overall, but as managers are aware, it is less good in mathematics than in English. It is for these reasons that achievement is good rather than outstanding. At the end of Key Stage 4 GCSE results are high. Around three quarters achieve five or more good grade passes. Although the number of students gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE in 2006 rose to the highest ever for the school, there was a slight drop in the overall performance, but this was anticipated by senior managers and challenging targets, including those for specialist status, were nevertheless met. Students in Year 11 are working well and show even higher standards in their work. The school is not complacent about these results and is working to accelerate the rate of progress of some lower-attaining students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

One student stated: 'I feel safe and happy here,' and this view is shared by others. Students enjoy school very much, as shown by their excellent attendance. Students value the opportunities provided for them, such as the varied extra-curricular activities. They appreciate the fact that their views are sought, respected and generally acted on. They are mature in their approach to school and demonstrate excellent attitudes to their learning. They make an impressive contribution to the school, for example through the school council, and to the broader community through charity fundraising. Their involvement in supporting a school in Malawi is helping develop their cultural awareness, as is their study of differing religions. They have good relationships with each other and behave well in and outside lessons. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students feel safe and well cared for, knowing that there are adults who really care about their well-being. One stated: 'There is always an adult to share problems with or ask for advice.' The appointment of a full-time pupil welfare officer has been pivotal to this success. Recent changes to the behaviour policy have met with approval from most students, who feel the system is now much more consistently applied by teachers. Students respond very well to the school's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles through diet and exercise. They are becoming mature young adults with a clear sense of responsibility.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students learn well because teaching is consistently good and on occasions outstanding. One parent stated: 'All teachers appear dedicated and hard working, motivated themselves by an excellent headteacher.' Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and lessons are carefully planned to ensure that students learn well. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this is reflected in the way in which students work hard and behave well. One stated: 'Teachers make learning fun.' Many teachers ensure that work is highly practical and it is in these lessons that the students learn the most. Resources have improved as a result of the specialist status and teachers now use computers very well to enhance learning. Students enjoy lessons that actively involve them in their own learning but are less keen on those that require them to 'write too much' or 'copy from the board'. Not all teachers make full use of the available information about how well individual students are doing and do not always ensure that the work given matches the needs of every student. This prevents some students from achieving and learning as well as they could. It is for these reasons that teaching is good rather than outstanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is wide and varied and includes an increasing number of vocational and work-related courses designed to cater for students in danger of disaffection. These are highly valued by students and parents. Some of these courses are run in a successful partnership with the local technical college. A particular strength is the massive range of out-of-school sports and performing arts activities that keep the students engaged and excited about coming to school. This has been externally recognised through the Artsmark and Sportsmark awards. The courses offered to students in Years 10 and 11 are well matched to their needs and aspirations. Students speak highly of the support they get when choosing subjects and they are happy with their choice. This innovative curriculum is constantly reviewed to ensure that it really does cater for all students. The impact of the bespoke courses is evident in the way in which students are so successful in gaining the qualifications they need and in how their personal development blossoms during their time in school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The importance the school attaches to promoting students' emotional and personal well-being is a real strength and is reflected in the outstanding arrangements for their care and support. There is an integrated approach to the services provided for students, such as for promoting their health and for counselling those having difficulties. Students speak highly of the support they receive. Even students who have no need to avail

themselves of these services feel reassured by their existence. As well as providing specific support to individuals, preventive work is carried out and valuable projects to help develop vulnerable students' self-esteem and confidence take place. Appropriate arrangements for child protection and health and safety are in place. The school monitors students' academic progress carefully and the information is used in a variety of ways to enhance their achievement, although it is not always used well enough to inform teaching. Target setting is another strength and students find their targets helpful and motivating. They know what they need to do to improve in all subjects but especially in science.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is highly respected by staff, students and parents. His exceptional educational vision is shared by all and is fundamental to the success of the school. One student said, 'He wants us to do the best we can in everything we do.' The senior leadership team has complementary skills that ensure that the highest standard of management is achieved throughout the school. Middle managers are strong and play a crucial role in determining the way forward. As summed up by one parent: 'Holmfirth High is one big team effort. That is why it is an excellent school.' Innovative approaches such as the appointment of a vocational coordinator and an ex-deputy headteacher as senior administrator have resulted in a management structure that really works. Other pioneering initiatives include the highly valued 'Spectrum', a multi-agency health and information centre. Regular and rigorous review and evaluation of performance keeps everybody on their toes. For example, managers have already identified mathematics as an area requiring further improvement and plans are well underway to tackle it. There is not a shred of complacency evident in anything the school does, no matter how well it does it. In fact, managers constantly strive to better all aspects of the school's work, as demonstrated in the reconfirmation of Investors in People status. Governors are extremely knowledgeable and many have considerable educational expertise. They hold the school to account and are analytical and accurate about how well it is doing. Financial management is secure, especially considering the low level of funding the school receives. Results have improved significantly since the previous inspection and all issues raised have been dealt with. Specialist status is flourishing, accommodation and resources have improved and the planned new mathematics facilities are anxiously anticipated. Managers demonstrate outstanding capacity to improve the school further.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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
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	1
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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 making our visit to your school so enjoyable. We were very impressed with the way in which you openly told us about what you liked about Holmfirth High. Your comments helped us to focus our inspection and check on just how well your school is doing. We agreed with you and were seriously impressed with how good your school is. We have judged it to be outstanding, which is the highest grade we can give. Please take the time to read through the full report and see how we have agreed with your views and how we have incorporated some of the things you said.

You told us how you enjoy coming to school and how the teachers and other staff make you feel cared for and safe. You are clearly proud of your school and talked enthusiastically about the wide range of out-of-school clubs and activities. Your comments about how you learn were very perceptive and it was clear that you know that you are doing well in a successful school. Some of you explained how you learned more in lessons that involved you in practical activities and how these were better than when teachers talk too much or make you copy from the board. Again we agree with you and we have asked the teachers to match the work they give you more closely to your needs so that you do really well in every lesson.

You were very positive about the way in which the discipline rules are improving behaviour and you like the way that teachers are consistently applying these rules so that you all know where you stand. You feel that your views are taken into account and you enjoy the responsibilities you are given. You told us how impressed you are with the 'Spectrum' facility and how you think the headteacher is firm but fair and doing the best for you. We think he and the other managers are doing a fantastic job.

There is no doubt that you and your parents are pleased with Holmfirth High and we can see why. It is an outstanding school!