



# Highfield School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 108311  
**Local Authority** Wakefield  
**Inspection number** 288065  
**Inspection dates** 27–28 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Kath Halifax

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Special            | <b>School address</b>   | Gawthorpe Lane         |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Community special  |                         | Ossett                 |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 11–17              |                         | West Yorkshire WF5 9BS |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed              | <b>Telephone number</b> | 01924 302980           |
| <b>Number on roll (school)</b>            | 142                | <b>Fax number</b>       | 01924 302983           |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body | <b>Chair</b>            | Mr Gordon Watson       |
|   |                    | <b>Headteacher</b>      | Mr A Spalding          |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 4 February 2002    |                         |                        |

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|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Age group</b> | <b>Inspection dates</b> | <b>Inspection number</b> |
| 11–17            | 27–28 November 2006     | 288065                   |

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

The school caters for a range of needs including moderate and severe learning difficulties, challenging behaviour, communication needs, sensory impairment and autism. Almost all students are of White British heritage with a small number of mixed race and other backgrounds. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is above average. Seven students are in public care.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

This is a good school that provides good value for money. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection and the school has good capacity for this to continue. Staff have coped well with the changing population, especially the increase in the number of students with autism. Through an effective training programme, the provision for these students is good so they achieve well. Some parents of students with autism had initial concerns about their child transferring to Highfield. Considerable efforts by staff resulted in comments such as 'I had real issues with the school, but my concerns have been listened to and acted on. My child is happy, safe and learning.' Furthermore, staff have had to adapt to the rise in the number of students with mental health needs and others for whom there is no suitable school in the authority. Well thought out programmes have been put in place to support these particularly vulnerable students.

Though standards are low because of students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, overall, achievement is good. Students of all abilities leave with a range of nationally recognised awards, and almost all transfer to further education. This is because of good teaching and an effective curriculum. Since the last inspection, staff have worked hard to improve the teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) and reading. This is evidenced in students' improved progress. Also, where writing is taught by specialist teachers of English, students make good progress, but in some other classes the range of writing is a little too narrow. The quality of support provided by classroom assistants is good overall. Most are skilled and contribute considerably to students' achievements, but a few are not fully aware of what is expected of them where specialist subject support is required.

Students make good gains in their personal development because of the good care and support they receive. Links between home and school are strengthened considerably by the work of the home-school support worker. Students enjoy coming to school, they behave well and their attendance is good. Those who have been excluded from other schools or who have difficulties in their personal life are successfully helped to come to terms with their problems. Students have a growing understanding of the need to keep safe and healthy. They contribute considerably to the school community. Work experience placements and college links prepare them well for life after school, but students have too few opportunities to contribute to the wider community. Furthermore, in this almost all-White school they have a limited awareness of the beliefs and traditions of other cultures.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders and governors have a clear vision for the school and are successfully focused on raising standards. Parents, students and other professionals think highly of the school and appreciate how well it provides for students of differing capabilities and backgrounds. Leaders and governors know what the school does well and what needs to be improved, though their self-assessment is generous and differs from inspection findings in some aspects.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the provision for writing so students achieve equally well in all aspects of English.
- Provide more training for support staff so they make a better contribution to students' progress.
- Improve the opportunities for students make a greater contribution to the wider community and develop a greater awareness of other cultures.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Since the last inspection the range and standard achieved in national awards in Year 11 has improved for students of all abilities. In addition to achieving Oxford and Cambridge and RSA examination board (OCR) English and mathematics up to Level 3, Welsh Joint Education Board (WJEB) certificates have been attained in science, art and physical education. In these subjects, higher-attaining students have gained merit and distinction awards. Lower-attaining students are equally challenged, gaining the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) bronze award. There has been considerable improvement in achievements in ICT because teachers are now more confident and have far better resources. It is, however, recognised that there is a need to introduce national awards for students in Years 10 and 11 in this subject.

Standards in writing are an area for improvement. Some students achieve well, but others do not do as well as they could, because the work is not matched to their needs. Furthermore, writing is not promoted sufficiently in other subjects, though this is not so in science where students write up their investigations well.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

Students enjoy coming to school. They are proud to discuss their work, which is displayed attractively around the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Many of those who have had poor attendance in mainstream schools attend well at Highfield. Students' good personal development and well-being are evident in the way most get along sociably and learn to look after themselves. They are proud to contribute to the school community and undertake their responsibilities conscientiously. For example, Year 11 students respond very positively to the additional responsibility of listening to students with autism read. Personal independence and opportunities to contribute to the outside community, however, are not given sufficient opportunity to flourish. Equally, many students are not yet demonstrating an awareness and sensitivity to appreciating the lives and cultures of others. For these reasons, personal development is good rather than outstanding.

The majority of students behave well because they feel so positively about the school, but despite the consistently applied behaviour policy, a handful of students display aggressive outbursts. The number of exclusions is rising and a few students have

concerns over the challenging behaviour of some of their peers. Vulnerable students appreciate having the choice of being able to relax in the sheltered environs of the youth club at break time.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Relationships between staff and all students are good, so students are not afraid to have a go at most things. Where lessons are taught by subject specialists, students make the best progress. This is especially so for students with autism. All teachers teach English. Most have come to grips with teaching reading and this is evident in students' progress. Whilst effective overall, the teaching of writing is a little weaker because on occasions, it is not fully matched to individual needs. Where this happens, some pupils' targets are too broad. For example, 'to improve handwriting' does not provide sufficiently small steps for students to work towards.

In most classes, classroom assistants and teachers work well together. The skills of individual support staff are used very effectively, for example in ICT, but sometimes classroom assistants do not have good enough subject knowledge. These factors limit students' learning. Teachers and support staff have adapted well to the changing population. Good behaviour management allows most lessons take place with learning uninterrupted.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum is well planned to match individual needs. The focus on the important subjects of English, mathematics and ICT sets students in good stead for further education. Good opportunities to take part in a very wide range of sport, art and drama provide good balance. Good links exist with local high schools, which contribute well to achievement in ICT. Other than this, however, students have too few opportunities to work alongside students in mainstream education. Students are well prepared for working life through good work experience and college links, though there are no enterprise projects. Good use is made of visits, visitors and lunchtime clubs to enrich the curriculum.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

Students and parents say the school provides a safe and supportive environment for learning and inspectors agree. The general view expressed by parents is that their child is 'in good hands' and 'receives a lot of care and support'.

Child protection procedures and health and safety requirements are made known to all staff. Support for vulnerable students and those in public care is strong. The work

of the home-school support worker goes a long way to helping the families whose problems seem insurmountable. Individual student's emotional needs are looked after well, for example by encouraging long-term school refusers to attend through flexible timetabling. Well established links with external agencies contribute considerably to students' well-being. Students receive suitable guidance but they do not always understand what they have to do to improve their learning, sometimes even commenting, 'We don't always know what we are going to learn.' For this reason, care and guidance is good rather than outstanding.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Inspection findings differ from the school's judgement of outstanding. Leadership and management are good. Governors support the headteacher's clear vision and sense of direction for the school. The changes in the school's population have been managed well, causing little upset. Leaders have provided effective training to guide and support staff in managing students who have been excluded from mainstream schools and those with mental health issues. Equally, the manager for students with autism has speedily ensured a flexible provision where students have the security of their own unit while spending increasing lengths of time in the main part of the school. In addition to giving access to qualifications, this prepares students with autism well for life beyond school. However, with all the changes to the school's population, the focus on assessment has slipped. Leaders have identified that, while students' achievements are recorded each year, assessment could be improved. They have recently purchased a commercial scheme and undergone training in its use to resolve this. Leaders and governors have demonstrated the knowledge and skill to take the school forward at a good rate.

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## Inspection judgements

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | <b>School Overall</b> |
|---|-----------------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 2   |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 2   |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 3   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | 2   |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 2 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 4 |
| 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

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                           | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 2 |
| The attendance of learners  | 2 |
| 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                                    | 3 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

### The quality of provision

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 2 |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 2 |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>   | 2 |

<sup>1</sup> 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

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 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  | 2   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 2   |
| 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**

We enjoyed visiting your school. Thank you for helping us with our work and talking to us. We especially enjoyed watching the 'street dancing'.

Your school is giving you a good education.

- You make good progress in achieving national awards such as ASDAN, WJEB and OCR because of good teaching.
- You enjoy school, are well behaved and attend regularly.
- The staff work closely with health workers and other professionals to make sure you are safe and well cared for.
- Lunchtime clubs, visits and visitors make learning fun and meaningful.

We have asked your teachers to do some things to make your school become even better.

- Make sure you do as well in writing as you do in reading.
- Help the support staff to make a better contribution to your learning.
- Provide more opportunities for you to make a greater contribution to the community outside school and develop a greater awareness of other cultures.

We enjoyed our short time with you and wish you well for the future.