



Belfairs High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115350
Local Authority SOUTHEND-ON-SEA
Inspection number 290215
Inspection dates 15–16 November 2006
Reporting inspector John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Highlands Boulevard
School category	Foundation		Leigh-on-sea, Southend
Age range of pupils	11–18		Essex SS9 3TG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	08444 772555
Number on roll (school)	1094	Fax number	08444 772556
Number on roll (6th form)	185		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs Betty Mashford
		Headteacher	Mr John Duprey
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	15–16 November 2006	290215

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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

Belfairs High School is a non-selective specialist Media Arts School in Southend-on-Sea where there are many selective grammar and faith schools in the area. The proportion of students identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is well above average. A larger than average number of students leave or join the school mid-way during the school year and the number of students whose first language is not English is increasing. Attendance is similar to the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is an improving school with many strengths. It prides itself in being a fully inclusive school that welcomes pupils from all backgrounds and has developed outstanding pupil support services to ensure that vulnerable pupils are introduced to, and then fully integrated into, mainstream school life. The recent improvements made are helping to generate greater pupil and parental confidence in the school. For example, one parental reply form commented that, 'along with our daughter, we chose Belfairs and neither she nor we regret that decision'.

Standards are below average but most pupils make progress in relation to their starting points and achieve well in Key Stage 3. Results in national tests have improved and the gap between school standards and those achieved nationally is narrowing. This is a direct result of good teaching and learning that stimulates the interest of learners and tracks the progress of individual pupils well. Teachers are particularly effective in engaging and supporting pupils of all abilities and interests, particularly lower-attaining pupils. Assessment informs most pupils of how well they are doing but few understand what they have to do to improve their work to meet the targets set for them.

Standards in Key Stage 4 are below average but improving: in 2006, 40% of pupils obtained five or more grades A* to C in GCSE examinations, a significant improvement on the previous year's results. However, the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics is well below the national average. Achievement is satisfactory overall but not all pupils meet the targets set for them in mathematics, mainly because non-specialist mathematics teachers who teach well in Key Stage 3 are less effective in teaching the GCSE course. Standards achieved in some vocational subjects, particularly those in media and arts are above the national average. Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support and enhance learning.

The personal development and well-being of all pupils is good. Pupils attend regularly and behave well in lessons and around the school. They display positive attitudes and many participate in a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. A good curriculum gives pupils access to a range of different qualifications, which is having a positive impact on engaging and retaining their interest and commitment in school. Pupils say that school is a safe, healthy and enjoyable place to be. The large media screen in the dining hall keeps them well informed of what is happening in school and how they can contribute to the wider community.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with students placing a high value on relationships with each other, with adults and with those less fortunate than themselves. Care, guidance and support for students are good with some outstanding features. A 'Transition House' that ensures vulnerable pupils have a smooth transition into Year 7 has led to a significant reduction in referrals for support and is praised by many parents. Targeted support that helps to induct and integrate individual pupils into classes is having a considerable impact on the achievement of many pupils,

including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, who make exceptional progress.

The school is well led by the headteacher who has engendered effective team-working to bring about improvement and resolve most of the issues raised in the previous inspection. Most middle managers are now more accountable for the performance of pupils in their subjects although a few require further support to develop their leadership skills. The school's view of itself is largely accurate, although self-evaluation doesn't always recognise fully how good aspects of its work are. Overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory and it is demonstrating it has good capacity to make further improvements.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress in relation to their lower than average attainment on entry. They praise the quality of provision and feel that they are taught well. They know where they are in relation to their targets, which are reviewed on a weekly basis, and feel that support provided by dedicated mentors helps to keep them focused. They speak highly of the guidance they received before joining the sixth form, including the taster sessions which gave them some idea of what to expect. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in Key Stage 4, particularly in mathematics, by improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Make further use of assessment information to ensure all pupils fully understand how well they are doing, that they know exactly what they have to do to improve their work and that they meet the suitably challenging targets set for them.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support and enhance their learning in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards on entry are below the national average. Standards remain below average by the end of Key Stage 3 but in recent years they have steadily risen, meeting the targets set by the local authority and narrowing the gap between the school's results and those achieved nationally. Standards are below average in Key Stage 4 but did improve significantly in 2006: 40% of pupils achieved at least 5 A* to C grades which was below the local authority's target but above the comparable figures for 2004 and 2005. The number of pupils obtaining 5 or more GCSE grades A* to G has improved steadily over the past five years but the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics is well below what is achieved nationally.

Achievement in mathematics slows significantly in Years 10 and 11 because teaching and learning are not as effective as they are in the earlier key stage.

Pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities make outstanding progress due to the high quality support they receive. Girls and boys make similar progress in most subjects but some more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged to achieve their very best. The school is aware of this and is working hard to raise teachers' expectations of these pupils. Monitoring of pupils' progress by teachers and subject leaders has improved but not all students are set suitably challenging targets or told what they need to do to achieve them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Attendance has improved significantly and is now in line with the national average. Behaviour has improved although some pupils say that not all staff manage pupil behaviour in lessons as effectively as others. Weekly assemblies provide a forum for information sharing and for celebrating success. Pupils enjoy school; they feel safe and know what to do if they feel threatened or unwell. Pupils lead healthy lifestyles; participation in physical education is good and many participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. Good progress has been made in introducing healthier meals at lunchtimes and changing the content of vending machines to include healthy snacks and drinks. They demonstrate a satisfactory awareness and understanding of the needs of others in the local, national and global communities through fund-raising activities and develop leadership skills when mentoring younger students and coaching in primary schools. All pupils benefit from work placements linked to their vocational interests which contribute directly to their social and economic well-being. The effective School Council has represented the views of the pupils and helped managers to make decisions about school uniform, the behaviour policy and the design of new school buildings.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school evaluates teaching and learning to be satisfactory but inspectors found it to be better than this in many lessons. Although there is much good teaching occasionally it is inadequate and in some subjects, including mathematics it is only satisfactory. The school is well aware of where inadequate teaching exists and is successfully providing the necessary support and challenge to remedy it. Most teachers plan interesting activities that stimulate and engage pupils of different abilities. Relationships are strong and class management is firm but fair, allowing pupils to work

hard without distractions and to make good progress. Teachers are particularly effective at engaging lower ability pupils in learning. For example, effective questioning and simplified writing frames used in an English lesson enabled pupils with learning difficulties to make good progress. This is a key strength observed in many lessons and this, coupled with effective management of pupil behaviour contributes directly to the progress made by most pupils and in particular, those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Performance data is used effectively to assess individual pupils' progress and to identify those requiring additional support or mentoring.

Some pupils are actively engaged in reflecting on what they have done in lessons and use information provided by teachers to gauge how much progress they are making. However, this is not universal across all subjects and not enough information is given to pupils to help them improve their work and attain higher standards. Homework is not set on a regular basis in all subjects and better use could be made of pupil journals to monitor how well they are doing. There are some inconsistencies in the marking of pupils' work and it does not always show them what they have to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides a good curriculum that meets the needs of its pupils and provides them with the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding to progress into further education or the world of work. All pupils follow at least one vocational course that includes a work experience tailored to individuals' needs. Clear progression routes into the sixth form have been developed; new media and arts courses enhance provision and are very popular with pupils. The school has utilised its specialist media facilities to raise pupils' self-esteem, develop respect for others and engage those at risk of not meeting the expectations of staff. Opportunities for enrichment outside the curriculum are varied and plentiful. Some progress has been made in extending literacy across the curriculum and media facilities are used well to promote learning in other subjects. However, ICT including interactive whiteboards, is not used on a regular basis, and pupils expressed the view with inspectors that they wanted more opportunities to use computers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support provided for students are good with some outstanding features. All staff have had recent training in child protection. Full assessments of all risks are in place and the systems for checking staff suitability are rigorous and fully meet government guidelines. The guidance and support offered by staff in the 'Transition House' is exceptional: they seek the views of parents and pupils before targeting suitable counselling and support to aid full integration into classes at an appropriate stage. The school's investment in a range of support staff and extensive

partnership working with external agencies is having a significant impact on pupils' personal development and achievement, particularly those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those pupils who join the school mid-way through the year.

There are good systems for teachers and managers to track pupils' progress, identify where intervention is needed and offer pupils the support they need. Pupils are given good guidance when selecting courses and when considering further study in the sixth form. Careers information in conjunction with the Connexions service is good.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. A very effective headteacher, ably supported by his senior leadership team, is committed to seeking further improvement. His vision of the development of an appropriate curriculum, raised expectations of teachers and managers and exceptional pupil care is leading to significant improvements that are welcomed by pupils, parents and the local community. A parents' forum provides an innovative means of gaining the views and support of parents.

The school's self-evaluation and development planning shows it is well placed to build on these improvements. It rightly recognises the importance of making significant improvements in the teaching of mathematics in Key Stage 4. Most middle managers are becoming effective and most are beginning to appreciate their role in leading as well as managing improvement in their subjects and in year groups. A few managers need further challenge and support to ensure effectiveness and consistency across all subjects. Governance is satisfactory; more governors get involved in monitoring the performance of subject areas.

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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
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	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

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	2	
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	3
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	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
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	3	
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

17 November 2006

Belfairs High School, Highlands Boulevard, Leigh-on-Sea, Southend, SS9 3TG

Dear Pupils

Recently I visited your school and found it to be a satisfactory and improving school with many strengths. Your input was vital in helping me to make this judgement, so thank you for allowing me to join you in lessons, talk with you and look at some of your work. I also spent time with some of your teachers, met with the chair of governors and read many letters from parents.

You and some of your parents told us about the significant improvements made in the school recently and that it is a safe, stimulating and enjoyable place to be. I was particularly impressed with how the school has designed the curriculum to increase the choice of courses and qualifications you will need to enter the world of work or continue your education in the sixth form. The support provided for some of you through the work of the 'Transition House' and the targeted services staff is exceptional; these high quality support systems are not seen in many other schools and those of you who have benefited from them are very fortunate and no doubt grateful.

Many pupils get involved in extra-curricular activities and some of the work I saw linked to the media and arts department was impressive. Most pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 but this is less pronounced in Key Stage 4; not enough pupils achieve 5 good GCSE pass grades including English and mathematics.

Therefore, I have asked your senior teachers to make three further improvements:

- Raise achievement in Key Stage 4, particularly in mathematics, by improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Use assessment information so all pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve their work so that they meet the suitably challenging targets set for them.
- Increase opportunities to use ICT to support and enhance learning in all subjects.

The headteacher and his team of staff lead and manage your school well. You can help them by asking your school council to share your views about the school with senior teachers. Once again, thank you for your help and I wish you all well.

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector.