

Heathfield Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123883
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	292828
Inspection date	13 December 2006
Reporting inspector	David Humphries 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	1179
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Baker
Headteacher	Elliott Furneaux
Date of previous school inspection	8 May 2001
School address	School Road Monkton Heathfield Taunton TA2 8PD
Telephone number	01823 412396
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Heathfield is a specialist arts school in the village of Monkton Heathfield. The school draws students from the nearby market town of Taunton and the surrounding rural area. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is broadly average. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups or with a first language other than English. The school campus includes a well- equipped performing arts centre which is managed jointly by the school and the Tacchi-Morris Trust.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Heathfield is an outstanding school. One parent wrote, 'The quality of teaching is excellent, the facilities first rate, and the atmosphere is friendly and encouraging'. This captures some of the key strengths of Heathfield. Teachers have very high expectations and there is a very sharp focus on learning and achieving. This is combined with a tangible sense of community in which individuals support and care for one another. Students thrive and enjoy their education in this atmosphere. They are eager to contribute to the life of the school and relish opportunities to take on responsibility.

Students have a clear sense of right and wrong and the great majority behave very well. Highly committed staff work hard to support the most vulnerable students. The school's impressive range of international links is used very effectively to develop students' understanding of other cultures and societies. Students have a good awareness of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles, but do not take full advantage of the options for healthy eating in the school canteen. They feel that they have not been actively involved in decisions about the meals which are available.

The school's specialist status and the outstanding performing arts facilities provided by the Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre have an impact beyond the immediate arts subjects. The arts contribute substantially to the school's highly inclusive ethos by developing students' self-confidence and ability to work together. A very well-designed curriculum blends academic and vocational courses and ensures that students are very well prepared for further education, training or employment when they leave the school.

The school has given a very high priority to improving the quality of teaching, which is now outstanding. This combines with other outstanding features to provide a powerful impetus for learning. Students work hard in a positive and supportive atmosphere where they want to be successful. They follow a curriculum which is carefully matched with their needs and they are very well taught. Consequently, they make outstanding progress and the standards they reach by age 16 are consistently well above average.

High expectations, a relentless drive to improve teaching and learning and a deep conviction that every student matters lie at the heart of the headteacher's aspirations for the school. He provides excellent leadership and is well supported by talented senior and middle leaders, who share his vision for the future. This is matched by the committed governors, who provide a constructive blend of support and challenge. The school is keenly aware of its strengths and areas for development. There have been substantial improvements since the last inspection and the school's capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

The school is heavily oversubscribed and extremely well regarded by the great majority of parents. One parent wrote, 'The school has been a wonderful place for all my children. It has inspired them and encouraged them as individuals.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Encourage students to eat more healthily by ensuring that they are actively involved in decisions about the meals which are available in the school canteen.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement and standards are outstanding. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. They make rapid progress through Years 7 to 9 and, although test results vary from year to year, the standards they reach at age 14 are well above average. Students continue to make impressive progress in Years 10 and 11 so that their results in examinations at age 16 are consistently well above average. Their overall progress through the school is outstanding. High quality support for individuals enables students with complex learning needs to make equally impressive progress.

Test and examination results regularly exceed the challenging targets set by the school. The school's analysis of its performance data is exemplary. Senior leaders are alert to signs of underachievement in specific subjects and tackle this promptly and effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students enjoy their education and have very positive attitudes towards learning. They become confident and articulate young people who contribute very well to the life of the school and the wider community. They relish opportunities to take on responsibility, particularly Year 11 students, who are active in mentoring younger students and in maintaining the school's cohesive and supportive ethos. Students thrive, and feel safe and valued. They learn to work cooperatively and gain important skills for their future well-being. Workplace skills are developed very effectively through work-related learning programmes and the school's enthusiastic collaboration with the local Education Business Partnership. The school's strong international links and specialist status are used very well to promote students' cultural development.

Students have a clear sense of right and wrong. The great majority behave very well and act safely and responsibly in lessons and around school. The few instances of poor behaviour are handled very effectively. In recent years attendance rates have been broadly average, but the school is working vigorously to tackle the poor attendance of a small number of students. The success of this work is shown in improved attendance rates in the current school year: these are now above average.

Students have a good awareness of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles and many of them participate enthusiastically in dance, games and sporting activities. While they appreciate the importance of healthy eating, they do not take full advantage of the options for healthy eating in the school canteen because they are not immediately attracted to them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. There is a great deal of well-paced, energetic and imaginative teaching which stimulates students' interest and enthusiasm. A comprehensive programme of coaching is successfully extending this highly effective classroom practice across the school. Teachers are keen to implement new approaches, such as defined seating plans to improve students' behaviour and motivation, particularly that of boys. There is a strong emphasis

on asking students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. Teachers use information from assessment very effectively to monitor students' progress and set targets. As a result, students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and know what they have to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. The very well-equipped Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre contributes enormously to a vibrant programme of dance and drama. One student described the opportunity to perform in the centre as, 'the most amazing experience I've ever had'. The arts centre and the school's specialist status have a substantial impact beyond the immediate arts subjects. Students develop important skills of making presentations, working together, listening and involving others. The arts contribute substantially to the school's highly inclusive ethos.

In Years 10 and 11, three distinct curriculum pathways are extremely well matched to students' needs. Productive partnerships with local further education colleges enable the school to provide vocational courses, which are highly valued by students.

A rich variety of extra-curricular activities complements the formal curriculum. Homework clubs are available for students who struggle to complete work out of school; travel home by minibus is provided and this helps to ensure good attendance levels. Travel to countries in Eastern Europe, the First World War battlefields and South America plays an important part in developing students' understanding of history and culture.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. The school's approach is highly systematic, building on very good links with local authority support agencies and through close liaison with families. Highly committed staff in the Flexible Learning Centre provide first-rate support and guidance for the most vulnerable students, including those who might otherwise not come to school at all. The few instances of bullying are dealt with very effectively. There are comprehensive child protection procedures and students are confident about approaching an adult if they are unhappy or anxious. Student 'listeners' and mentors have been trained to support students in difficulties but are also very aware of when to involve a member of staff. One parent wrote that her daughter had 'fantastic support from her tutor, teaching staff and a Year 11 mentor. A wonderful school'.

Well-designed induction programmes help new students to settle quickly into the life of the school. Thereafter, their progress is tracked very carefully and they receive very good support and guidance when they choose which courses to study in Years 10 and 11 and when they prepare for further education or employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding. The headteacher provides excellent forward-thinking leadership. He is supported strongly by very capable senior and middle managers, who share his vision for the school. Staff feel engaged in shaping the school's future

and are given appropriate autonomy to take initiatives forward. One parent wrote about 'the excellent strong leadership from the headteacher which inspires the whole school, both staff and children, to do well'. The school is a highly inclusive community where students and staff feel valued.

All aspects of the school's performance are carefully and rigorously monitored. A very thorough analysis of each summer's test and examination results is prepared for the start of the autumn term, so that any underperformance can be dealt with immediately. Lines of accountability are clear and unambiguous: subject departments are encouraged to take responsibility for evaluating and improving their work. There is a relentless drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and senior leaders have devised very good systems to extend the best classroom practice across the school. Governors are knowledgeable and committed: they provide a very good balance of support and challenge. They regularly observe lessons and scrutinise other aspects of the school's work very carefully. A programme of presentations enables governors to gain a valuable overview of development priorities within subject departments. The chairs of the various governors' subcommittees work closely with the headteacher to shape the strategic development of the school.

The school has been extremely successful in attracting substantial funding from a variety of sources and has used such funding very well to improve accommodation and facilities. These include the Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre and a large all-weather pitch, which have contributed greatly to the quality of provision. The school provides outstanding value for money.

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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
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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?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
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?	1
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.

Annex A

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

I am sure that you will remember that your school was inspected on 13 December 2006. My colleague and I enjoyed meeting some of you and listening to your views. Many of your parents and carers completed a questionnaire to let us know how they felt about the school. I hope you will talk to them about the inspection report because it explains what your school does well and how it can become better.

Heathfield is an outstanding school. There is a very strong focus on learning and achieving and this is combined with a supportive and caring atmosphere. This combination is the greatest strength of the school. You should take a great deal of credit for this. You want to do well and are keen to contribute to the life of the school. You have a clear sense of right and wrong and the great majority of you behave very well. Year 11 students play a valuable role when they support younger students.

Staff make an equally important contribution. The curriculum is very well matched to your needs and interests. Extra-curricular activities provide a rich variety of educational opportunities for you, extending well beyond the school to other countries and continents. The school's specialist status and the Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre bring enormous benefits which are not limited to the arts subjects. They provide experiences which help to develop your self-confidence and ability to work together. The school also provides you with excellent care and support and very helpful guidance about the next stage of your education or future employment. First-rate teaching ensures that you make outstanding progress, so that the standards you achieve are well above average.

One of the main reasons for the success of your school is that you have an excellent headteacher. He is very well supported by some talented staff in key leadership roles and by a hardworking team of teachers and support staff. They are constantly seeking to improve the school because they want the very best for you.

We know that you understand the importance of having a healthy lifestyle, but many of you are reluctant to take advantage of the healthy choices in the school canteen. We have asked the school to involve you more in decisions about the meals available. I hope you will make the most of opportunities to get involved in these discussions and take full advantage of the options for healthy eating, which are important for your well-being.