

The Harwich School a Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115369
Local Authority	ESSEX
Inspection number	295397
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1127
6th form	133
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Mountford
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Hall Lane Dovercourt Harwich Essex CO12 3TG
Telephone number	01255 245460
Fax number	01255 241144

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2007
Inspection number	295397

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Harwich School, a Language College, is larger than average and serves a mixed area. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities has increased substantially and is currently well above the national average. The proportion having a statement of special educational needs is above the national average. Students enter the school with levels of attainment which overall are below average.

The school was designated as a specialist school with Language College status in 2000 and redesignated as such in September 2005. The deputy headteacher is acting as headteacher until a permanent headteacher takes up the post.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

When Harwich School was last inspected in February 2006 inspectors found a number of weaknesses, particularly in relation to the behaviour and attendance of students in the main school and, standards and achievement and leadership and management in the sixth form. As a result, the school was issued with a Notice to Improve.

A lot has happened in the last year, particularly in the last nine months, and there are clear signs of improvement. Although leadership and management overall are satisfactory, leaders and managers at all levels set a clear sense of direction, and the quality of provision and progress made by students are now satisfactory. In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement because its overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

While the progress of students is generally satisfactory, many start from a low baseline, so results gained by them in examinations at the age of 16 are still below average. The top priority for the school is to raise standards achieved in examinations.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory at the time of the last inspection, and the school has made a determined effort to improve it further, with some success. The teaching is still satisfactory overall, with some good lessons which are well planned and provide pupils with engaging learning opportunities. There are, however, other lessons where learning is dull and where the behaviour of some of the students is barely acceptable, and the school knows it needs to do more to eliminate such shortcomings. It is generally the case that teachers do not use marking and assessment as well as they should to identify what students have learned and help improve students' learning by informing what they should do next. Information is also not used consistently by staff to track progress effectively.

The range of courses offered to students is good, with a wide variety of vocational and academic programmes on offer to students at ages 14 and for those who stay on into the sixth form. Furthermore, there is a good choice of out-of-hours activities for pupils to follow if they choose. By contrast, the provision of religious education for some 15 and 16 year olds is not as good.

Satisfactory care, guidance and support result in satisfactory personal development of students. Most enjoy coming to school, attend punctually and behave well. They make an increasingly positive contribution to the school and the local community, and have a good and developing understanding of social, moral, spiritual and cultural issues facing them as young people. However, there is a small number whose attendance is poor and irregular, so overall attendance rates are still low, and there is also a minority of students whose behaviour is unacceptable at times. The school is tackling these issues successfully, but still needs to do more.

Staff and students are rightly convinced that the recent changes are improving the school. Links with parents are improving; however, though more parents attend progress review days and are very positive about the recent developments, a few are still concerned about bullying and behaviour in the school. Links with other partners in education are strong.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. The 'open door' policy enables all Year 11 students to join the sixth form, and consequently standards on entry are

slightly below the national average. Examination results in 2006 continue the upward trend and students make satisfactory progress to achieve broadly average standards. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with some good features seen in lessons. School assessment data indicates that students are on track to meet the 2007 target for A2 results, thereby consolidating improvement. However, the data also shows that the AS results are not improving at the same rate. Greater support is being provided to ensure that Year 11 students make the right subject choice when entering the sixth form.

The sixth form, through the transition programme, has developed closer involvement with the main school than previously. Personal development is satisfactory, and sixth formers say they enjoy the opportunities given to them to work with the younger students. Committed staff provide good care, guidance and support. The team is now led and managed satisfactorily and new strategies are in place to maintain the overall rise in standards which demonstrate its good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' overall standards and achievement.
- Improve overall teaching, including the teachers' skills in identifying what students have learned and what they need to do next.
- Ensure that assessment information and the tracking of students' progress is used fully by all staff to help every student achieve to their full potential.
- Improve further students' behaviour and attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Although the results at the end of Key Stage 3 show marked improvement over previous years, overall achievement remains satisfactory. Attainment of students entering the school in Year 7 is below the national average and standards at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 are below the national average. Nevertheless, school data indicates that students are on track to meet the challenging targets set for 2007.

Results at the end of Key Stage 4 show an upward trend. The percentage of students achieving 5 A* to C GCSE grades in 2006 increased but some inconsistencies exist between the subjects, and both French and German performed less well in 2006, because of staffing problems. The specialist status enables the school to offer a broad curriculum and challenge higher achieving students. Although the school did not meet its specialist school targets, it has taken effective steps to rectify this. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress.

Standards in the sixth form have continued to rise and students generally make satisfactory progress to achieve standards which are broadly average having entered the sixth form with standards slightly below average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Most students enjoy school and express their views confidently. Recent strategies introduced are improving behaviour and teachers are

responding consistently to any low level disruption occasionally evident in lessons. Overall behaviour in lessons and around the school is now satisfactory. Measures, like first day phone call intervention and the rewards system, have contributed to the improvements in behaviour and punctuality and in reducing exclusions. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Efforts are being made to change the culture of the school as exemplified through an interactive assembly. The student voice is a developing area through different councils. Students say that they feel safe. They agree that bullying is minimal and that there are clear support systems for them. The majority of students lead a healthy lifestyle through exercise and healthy eating. They are aware of possible dangers related to smoking, solvent and drug abuse, and know what they need to do to keep themselves safe. Work on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), throughout school, helps to prepare students adequately for the next stage of their education and their future lives. Sixth form students make a valuable contribution to the school community by working with younger students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The school has implemented a rigorous process for monitoring lessons. Those teachers who have been identified as performing less well have been targeted for support. Whole school training sessions are being held to move individual teachers and departments forward. The school is also making good use of Advanced Skills Teachers to spread good practice.

The majority of lessons are planned effectively for students to learn through a range of interesting activities that are aimed at an appropriate level but in other lessons ineffective use of assessment means they do not build effectively on previous learning. Teachers know their subjects well. The pace is brisk, engaging students as they move from one part of the lesson to the next. Classes are generally well managed and, as a result, students' behaviour is satisfactory and they are able to work effectively throughout the lesson. Where ICT is used, it is used well by teachers to aid learning.

The inconsistency in assessment and recording of students' achievements is being addressed by the school, for example, in marking and tracking progress. However, on too many occasions, teachers do not adequately assess students' written work nor do they provide feedback on how well they are learning. Only in the sixth form are clear targets set, to ensure that students have an understanding of the level they are working towards and how they can improve. This limits the ability of some students to take responsibility for their own learning. The school recognises that its ablest students could be better challenged in some lessons and is putting schemes in place to do this.

The school has recently begun to monitor the setting and marking of homework to improve consistency and to ensure that all students are offered sufficient challenge.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good overall. It has some outstanding features but also has an aspect to improve. It provides a wide range of opportunities for learners to progress and perform. There is an emphasis on modern foreign languages in all years, reflecting the school's specialist status.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced, with all students studying one modern foreign language in Year 7 and two in Years 8 and 9. Higher attaining students in Year 9 follow a fast track route in their first foreign language leading to GCSE at the end of Year 10 and AS level in Year 11. All students take a common core of subjects at Key Stage 4 with half of students taking two languages and good provision being made for those who only wish to study one. The Key Stage 4 curriculum includes a good range of academic options and extra lessons in English and mathematics. The school is working hard to improve the provision for religious education in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Outstanding alternative work-related courses and work experience are provided in partnership with other institutions and local employers. The school has received national recognition for its developments in this area which meets the needs of targeted students well.

Students receive good careers guidance. There is a well-planned programme of personal and social education that includes citizenship and promotes students' awareness of health and safety. There are extensive opportunities for enrichment activities, for example, the 'Learning Zone', that contributes to the improving trend in learning. Levels of participation in such activities are increasing. The breadth of extra-curricular provision, including outside visits, is good and adds considerable enjoyment to students' time at school.

The sixth form is building curriculum pathways that develop seamlessly from Year 11, in particular, the vocational aspects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school is developing a culture where students feel safe, cared for and well supported. There are good systems in place to ensure that the small group of vulnerable students and those with specific learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and cared for by both staff and outside agencies. Child protection procedures meet current government requirements.

Health and safety procedures are clear. Students say that they feel safe and any incidents of racism or bullying are dealt with swiftly. Form tutors and pastoral care staff know their students and support them well. The school has recently implemented an effective academic mentoring programme to help students at risk of underachievement. Good guidance is offered to students about future careers and life choices. In the sixth form, care guidance and support is good. This is a consequence of the strong pastoral and academic help which is given to individual students. The arrangements made for communicating with parents and carers about their children's progress have improved and are now at least satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The acting headteacher has been in post since June 2006. He provides clear, decisive leadership for the whole school community. Through his strong leadership, he has quickly established the structures and systems to secure ongoing improvements. The members of the senior leadership team are confident and able, both as a group and as individuals, in driving forward improvements in their specific areas of responsibilities. Together they have established a clear focus on raising standards and achievement throughout the school. The improvements made since the last inspection show the school is well placed to continue improving.

Accurate self-evaluation is ensured by rigorous monitoring. Consequently, teaching and learning have improved and students' progress and achievement are satisfactory. Middle management varies in quality and effectiveness but, in general, weaknesses are identified and tackled well. Staff recruitment difficulties have had an unsettling effect on students. The school has now employed a number of permanent cover supervisors who are known to the students and who are fully engaged in professional development.

Governors are now kept well informed. They are growing in confidence, support the school well and are increasing their skills to hold the managers to account. They inform themselves through closer links with subject departments. Financial management is good, and expenditure well controlled. The school offers satisfactory value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

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?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	3	3
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?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	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?	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?	3	3
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	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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

15 March 2007

Dear Students

The Harwich School a Language College, Hall Lane, Dovercourt, Harwich, Essex, CO12 3TG

This letter is to tell you the results of your school's inspection. I would like to thank you all, on behalf of the inspection team, for your cooperation and help during our visit. You told us how the school had improved and how supportive your teachers are. We enjoyed very much talking to you and appreciated your comments.

When your school was inspected just over a year ago, it was given a Notice to Improve because some aspects were not good enough so that some of you were not making sufficient progress. This inspection was to see if the school had improved enough. I am happy to say that the school has improved and it is now giving you a satisfactory education. It no longer needs a Notice to Improve. This is the result of a lot of hard work by the staff and by you, and particularly by your headteacher and his senior team.

The school cares for you and guides you well and now has good systems to support you when you need help. Although attendance has improved and most of you now behave well you still need to help the school to make these even better. As a result, as some of you told us, the school is a much better place to learn. The sixth form is much better and gives you a range of opportunities to help you in your future careers.

In order to make the school even better, we have asked the staff and governors to:

- help you improve your overall standards and achievement
- improve their overall teaching, including the teachers' skills in identifying what you have learned and what you need to do next
- make sure that assessment information and the tracking of your progress is used fully by all staff to help every student achieve to their full potential
- work with you to improve further your behaviour and attendance.

Congratulations on helping your school to improve after the last inspection. I hope that you continue to help the school even more. On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif

Her Majesty's Inspector