

Heathcote School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103097
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	308219
Inspection dates	31 October –1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Gill Close HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	883
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Moyes
Headteacher	Mr Barry Hersom
Date of previous school inspection	2 June 2003
School address	Normanton Park Chingford London E4 6ES
Telephone number	020 8498 5110
Fax number	020 8529 3935

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Heathcote School serves students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, with an above average proportion eligible for free school meals. Two thirds of the students are White British; one third comes from a broad range of ethnic backgrounds, of whom a few are at early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is well above average, as is the percentage with statements of special educational need. The school has a hearing impairment unit. There are six looked after children and a considerable number of other students who face challenging circumstances in their life. Since the last inspection, the number of students has increased by almost one fifth and the attainment on entry has risen. It is now broadly average for the younger students.

Heathcote became a science specialist college in September 2003. It is an extended school offering a range of services and has recently gained healthy school status. It moved into a new building in October 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Heathcote School is a good school in which students make good progress and are well cared for. It has improved greatly since the last inspection under the outstanding leadership of the headteacher. The clear focus on Key Stage 4 has helped overall standards rise to close to average, while good literacy support has contributed to improvements in English standards, which are now above average at Key Stage 3. From their starting points, students have made good progress by the end of each key stage, except in science where progress is satisfactory and standards are below average. The large number of students with learning difficulties or disabilities, including those with hearing impairment, is supported well and also makes good progress.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students get on well together and enjoy participating in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, although they wish that all lessons would be as interesting as the best ones. The majority behaves well but there is some unsatisfactory behaviour in lessons that slows learning. There are excellent procedures for safeguarding students. The good quality of care is a strength of the school. It ensures that all students with personal difficulties or who are falling behind receive special support and that no-one drops through the net. Together with all of the additional help and revision that staff provide, it assists students in making good progress even though teaching is satisfactory. Students work diligently in lessons. Nevertheless, lessons often allow them to be too passive and do not challenge them to think hard or participate in interesting activities. The curriculum is good in meeting students' needs and supporting them in continuing in education.

Provision has been enhanced by the school's specialist science college status, which has funded extensive information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and allowed smaller class sizes in mathematics and science. These have contributed to the increased use of ICT across the school and rising standards, although recent recruitment difficulties have hampered improvements in science.

Leadership and management are good. Evaluation is accurate and leads to appropriate targets. However, the resulting plans do not identify priorities clearly enough or express them sufficiently well in terms of measurable impact. The school has correctly identified that assessment and targets are not used consistently for efficient identification of underachievement, or to inform intervention and planning precisely enough. It is putting measures in place to address this. Improvements since the last inspection in standards, progress, provision and the points raised show good capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching through a sharper focus on challenging students to think and engaging them more actively in their learning.
- Raise standards overall and, in science, improve progress.
- Use assessment and targets more consistently to inform intervention and planning.
- Establish priorities for development, expressed clearly in terms of measurable impact.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards reached are broadly average, with some below average. Standards have risen substantially since the last inspection. At Key Stage 4, they have reached close to the national average overall and in mathematics. At Key Stage 3, standards are above average in English but remain below it in mathematics and science. In 2007, the Year 9 group reaching these standards contained a particularly high proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities, roughly one half. The school has correctly identified science, ICT and humanities as subject areas in which attainment has been low; it has new staff and measures in place that are raising standards.

From their low starting points, students have made good progress. During Key Stage 3, progress is very good in English but not good enough for some high attainers in science. In Key Stage 4, progress is good overall but in science it is satisfactory and leads to standards that are significantly below average. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language receive effective support that enables them to make similar good progress to other students. All groups of students make expected or better progress.

The school has met its challenging Key Stage 4 targets for 2007, but missed those at Key Stage 3, other than in English where they were greatly exceeded following a large rise in standards. Results have moved closer to the science college targets and met some of them in mathematics, but science results lag furthest behind target.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students relate well to each other so that there is a friendly atmosphere when they talk or play in groups at breaks and lunchtimes. Their appreciation of the beliefs and values of others is good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Many of them are keen to play an active part in the life of the school through clubs and activities. Those who help others by mentoring younger students or by training pupils in local primary schools take this responsibility seriously. Students look after their personal safety carefully both in lessons and around the buildings giving due attention to required procedures. The healthy food that they buy in school was introduced at their request after trials by the school council. Although the council has not yet convened this term, elections are under way. Students feel that there is a need for greater communication between school council members and others. Students spoken to by inspectors stated that they enjoy school, particularly the extra activities and clubs outside lessons. They wish that all lessons were as interesting as the best, in which they participate in a wide range of activities. In some lessons, the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few students slows learning for the class. Most students behave well in lessons and around the school. Attendance has improved recently and is now good, as a result of strenuous efforts by the school to stress to parents and students the importance of coming to school. Up to date displays of individual attendance rates are closely followed, encouraging students to improve. Progress made in literacy and numeracy contributes well to students' good development of skills for adult life, although they are very dependent on teachers' guidance and support. A high proportion continues in education beyond age 16.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers use praise successfully to help students stay focused. Students work diligently and classroom relationships are harmonious, although poor behaviour sometimes disrupts learning. In some lessons, students are given interesting activities on which they work together energetically. Often they are not involved deeply enough in their learning; they are allowed to be too passive, such as when listening or copying, and are not challenged to think hard or understand. These experiences, they say, reduce their motivation and enjoyment of lessons. However, teachers work very hard to give extra help outside lessons, including revision sessions, to ensure that students achieve well. Literacy support is particularly effective for lower attainers. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language are supported well and make good progress, but some higher attaining students say that the demands made on them are too low. The library is used well to support learning both during and out of lessons. Much marking is done conscientiously but assessment does not always show students how well they are doing or specifically how to improve. The school monitors the quality of teaching but the focus on learning has not been sharp enough to ensure improvement to consistently good practice throughout the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good. It meets the needs, interests and abilities of students, and is under review to enhance this further. Weaknesses noted at the last inspection have been addressed. A programme of citizenship and personal, social and health education contributes well to students' personal development. It effectively encourages students to stay safe and pursue healthy lifestyles, supported by the good opportunity for all to study food technology and take two hours of physical education per week. A particular strength of the curriculum is the opportunity for all students to take some examinations in Year 10 and thus, in Year 11, benefit from a wider range of subjects, some for examination purposes and some not. This has had a marked impact on raising standards for students at risk of leaving education early. Students benefit from ICT-based individual support for literacy and mathematics. All students study at least one vocational course and undertake work experience. This, together with the strong focus on raising standards, supports them well as they prepare for the world of work. Students enjoy a wide range of well-attended extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities. These include regular sessions during which older students provide support in core subjects to younger ones.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's care for its students is good overall, with some areas of excellence. Staff take a close interest in the social and emotional needs of individual students, dealing swiftly and sensitively with issues as they arise. The student support team members collaborate effectively to make sure that appropriate action is taken, with extensive use of external agencies such as social services whenever necessary. All students are monitored so that, if any student is causing some concern, whether for academic or personal reasons, an individual learning plan is worked out in collaboration with student and parents. Written responses to these from parents are very

positive. Staff aim to ensure that no student falls through the net and persevere to the greatest possible extent to support students who face challenging circumstances or have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school has reduced bullying by dealing effectively with it where it occurs and by informing students clearly about where to get help. The school is designed to allow access to students with the full range of physical disabilities, so that they are integrated into normal lessons as much as possible. All students receive brief training on hearing impairment and sign language. Excellent measures are in place for the safeguarding of students. Academic guidance is less strong. The use of assessment has improved since the last inspection and informs support soundly. Nevertheless, it does not consistently or efficiently enable students' progress against targets to be monitored, or focus intervention or planning precisely enough. The school has rightly recognised this and is putting improved systems into place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He has a very clear sense of direction that has underpinned the school's improvement, and has high expectations for the school's further development. He is given good support by senior leaders. Staff share a keen desire for improvement. However, although appropriate targets for improvement have been set, they are not always clearly prioritised or sufficiently measurable in terms of impact to allow progress against them to be monitored. The leadership and management of middle managers are variable. Department reviews contribute well towards school evaluation, but they are not always sufficiently focused on learning issues. Evaluation and action build on the views of students, parents and staff effectively, such as in the recent behaviour and attendance review, but some parents would like more account taken of their views. The school's own evaluation is accurate. Staff development is valued and its use is having a beneficial impact upon the quality of teaching and the quality of management. School governance is satisfactory. The governing body is committed and well informed. The day-to-day financial planning and management of resources are efficient and effective. The low level of funding is managed effectively and longer term strategic planning, supported by focused budgetary projections, is of good quality.

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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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	3
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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
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

14 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Heathcote School, London, E4 6ES

Thank you very much for all of the helpful information you gave us when we visited your school recently. We found that your school is a good school. It helps you to make good progress overall and satisfactory progress in science. The good care that staff provide helps you all to deal with any difficulties you may have and to do well. You get on well together and most of you behave well, although there is some disruption in lessons which slows down the learning for the class. Your attendance has improved and you are rightly proud of this achievement.

You told us that you enjoy some of your lessons, when you work together on interesting activities, but find some others boring. We found that teaching is satisfactory. You work hard, but lessons often include too much time for listening passively so you do not have enough opportunity to think hard or do an interesting activity to help you learn. The range of subjects for you to study and the optional clubs and activities outside lessons are good. They help you to be healthy, prepare for the future and support other students. Teachers give you some targets to aim for and some guidance on what you need to do to improve, but these are not useful enough in some subjects if you are falling behind.

The school has improved a great deal since the last inspection under the excellent leadership of your headteacher. School leaders know what the school does well. They have planned where it needs to improve but plans do not show the priorities clearly or the impact on your progress and personal development well enough.

We think the school should help you to reach higher standards in the subjects you study and to make better progress in science. Teachers should give you more work which challenges you to think hard and become actively involved. Targets and assessment should be used more consistently to help you to make better progress. The school should make its priorities for improvement clear and show how it will check their impact on your progress and personal development.

My best wishes to you for success in the future and in helping your school to become even better.

Gill Close

HMI