

Handsworth Wood Girls' Visual and Performing Arts Specialist College
and Sixth Form Centre
Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103505
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308341
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Davinder Dosanjh 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	667
6th form	51
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	S Nepaulsingh
Date of previous school inspection	12 January 2004
School address	Church Lane Handsworth Birmingham B20 2HL
Telephone number	01215 548122
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Age group	11-18
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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

Handsworth Wood is smaller than most secondary schools. It became a specialist school for visual and performing arts in September 2006. The great majority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with Pakistani, Indian and Caribbean forming the largest groups. For many students English is an additional language. Over half the students are eligible for free school meals. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, again around half, is well above the national average. The school receives a significant minority of students who join the school at times other than the beginning of the school year. Some of these students are new arrivals to the country and include refugees and asylum seekers.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Handsworth Wood is a good school. It is an inclusive community where different cultures are respected and celebrated. There is a very positive school ethos where students demonstrate good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. The headteacher's support and care for all members of the school community creates a happy school. A real strength is the relationships between staff and students. Students feel safe and enjoy school.

Visual and performing arts status is starting to bring benefits to the students and school. It has improved the confidence of students and brought in many groups of performers, giving many opportunities for cultural enrichment. Cultural events such as Vaisakhi concerts and Black History month are a prominent part of the school's work. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and given a high priority. The curriculum meets the needs of individual students well. There are a range of vocational courses and opportunities to study courses at local colleges. The take-up in subjects related to visual and performing arts has improved. Students value and enjoy the broad enrichment activities on offer.

Achievement is good. The percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE is well above average and continues to rise. In 2007 significant improvement was made to the percentage of students achieving five or more A* to C grade at GCSE including mathematics and English, which is now just below the national average. This has been achieved through improved leadership in English and improved staffing in mathematics. Extra classes after school and on Saturdays have supplemented this. Standards at Key Stage 3 show a less consistent pattern of improvement and are below national average.

Teaching and learning are good, especially where there is a focus on developing literacy skills and challenging activities. The advanced skills teachers are good role models to other staff and a real asset to the school. The school also provides a good level of care and support for students. Effective systems are in place to promote better attendance and identify students in need of support. However, insufficient use is made of assessment data across the school to consistently identify underachievement and target students at risk of this.

Leadership and management are good. Staff are loyal and highly committed. Senior managers know the school well and have a clear overview of what needs to be done to improve the school further. The capacity to improve is good, as shown by the rise in standards in English and mathematics and improvements since the previous inspection. However, school improvement is not always efficient. The school does not have a consistent and rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating its performance and actions to address weaknesses are not always well co-ordinated. There is plenty of good practice in the school, which is not always fully utilised. This is evident in subject self-evaluations.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is small but provides an effective education for girls who wish to continue at the school for reasons of cultural preference or because of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some of these students might not otherwise continue in education or training. Many high attaining girls leave the school after GCSE examinations to study elsewhere. Achievement is satisfactory overall. The performance at A and AS level varies from year to year and there is no consistent trend. There are many individual success stories with students going on to run their

own businesses or entering higher education. However, the curriculum is limited in the range of courses available and there is little collaboration with local schools and colleges. Teaching is satisfactory overall with some being good. There are insufficient opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and work independently. Students value the individual support and guidance they receive in a very nurturing environment. Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and the opportunity to follow short courses in information and communication technology to prepare them for the workplace. A small number act as peer mediators. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is satisfactory but senior managers have not rigorously reviewed and evaluated its work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve collaboration with local schools and colleges to develop a broader curriculum and improve teaching to raise standards and achievement in the sixth form.
- Improve the rigour of school monitoring and evaluation procedures so actions to address weaknesses are more effectively co-ordinated.
- Develop a more consistent approach to the use of data in tracking and monitoring student progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has continued to improve standards and achievement since the previous inspection. Students enter the school with attainment well below average and make good progress. Standards by the end of Year 9 are below average and the pattern of improvement uneven.

The school achieved its best GCSE results in 2007. The proportion of students who achieve five or more higher A* to C grades at GCSE continues to be above the national average and in 2007 rose to 70%. The introduction of vocational courses that better match the needs of students has helped to raise standards. However, the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grade at GCSE including mathematics and English had been fairly static and well below the national average. The school has taken considerable steps to improve the results in both these subjects. In 2007 results improved by 12% and are now just below national average. A small number of students are entered for GCSE examinations early and have been successful in mathematics and religious education.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with English as an additional language make good progress due to the very good support they receive.

Standards on entry to the sixth form are below average. Pass rates on A and AS level courses are below average and vary from year to year. Only a small number of girls take these qualifications. Students are particularly successful on the vocational childcare course. Students' progress in the sixth form is satisfactory overall.

Statutory targets have been met or exceeded at Key Stage 4 and specialist targets have been exceeded, but at Key Stage 3 not all targets have been met.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Personal development is good overall. The emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues is particularly strong in citizenship, personal and social education and religious education. It gives students responsible attitudes and respect for others' rights, faiths and traditions. Students express their views strongly on the school council and feel that staff take their ideas seriously, for example over the design of the new school uniform. Senior students willingly take on responsibility as prefects, but not all sixth form students are sufficiently involved in activities involving the rest of the school. Students show a good sense of community service through fund raising for charity and involvement in projects with local primary schools.

Students behave well in class and around the school. They take a pride in their school and enjoy lessons and the extra-curricular activities on offer. The school works hard at improving attendance. It has improved since the previous inspection but is still below the national average. Systems to collect accurate data for sixth form students are underdeveloped. A strong pastoral system and clear policies against racism and bullying ensure that students feel safe and are confident about approaching trusted adults with any problems.

Students gain a good understanding of how to live healthily but some students are not yet applying this knowledge sufficiently to their own lives. Students make satisfactory progress in equipping themselves with skills that will benefit their future economic well-being through the school's programme of work related learning and vocational courses. Students' standards in literacy and numeracy and the limited amount of curriculum time for careers education are restricting progress in this area.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning observed during the inspection were never less than satisfactory, often good and occasionally outstanding. Students behave well, want to learn and have good relationships with their teachers. This creates a positive learning environment in which students are able to take full advantage of the teaching they receive. Students gain the most from lessons where the activities and questioning encourage them to discuss, explain and think about what they are doing. This helps to develop their literacy skills in particular and gives them confidence in their abilities to achieve well. Where, occasionally, lessons are satisfactory rather than good teachers do not provide enough of these opportunities. As a result the girls are more passive and make less progress in their learning. Lesson planning and objectives are sometimes not as precise as they could be and sufficient time is not always left at the end of the lesson to check the students' learning. Students' know their targets but not always what to do to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

In Years 7 to 9, the school provides a broad and balanced range of activities meeting National Curriculum requirements and reflecting the arts college specialism by increased dance and drama. The curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds offers a wide variety of courses that are flexible to meet individual students' needs. It includes vocational options including apprenticeship courses in childcare, performing arts, hairdressing and beauty. The 'Employability Skills' course in Year 11 has been particularly effective in raising the self-confidence of low achievers.

Students' personal and social development and citizenship lessons are enriched by input from health care and other professionals. The school has recognised that some students are not receiving their full entitlement to information and communication technology (ICT) and is taking steps to address the matter. A good variety of enrichment activities enhances the formal curriculum, particularly in the performing arts and physical education, including visits from professional dance groups and the opportunity to debate in the Young People's Parliament. The ICT and art departments welcome students at lunchtimes and after school, enabling them to use facilities in a supported environment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school is rightly proud of its caring ethos. Support begins for students before they enter the school. Efficient processes are in place to ease the transition, including support for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Heads of student progress know and care for their students well. They are always available to support students with problems and aim to follow up issues quickly. Attendance and punctuality are carefully monitored in the main school. The school nurse provides a drop-in clinic every week. Although academic progress is monitored and parents kept informed, assessment data is not used well enough to enable the rapid identification of underachievement and allow appropriate targets to be set. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and English as an additional language is very well monitored and appropriate support identified, enabling them to achieve well.

Child protection policies are in place and vulnerable students receive well co-ordinated support from a variety of outside agencies.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Senior leaders and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and this has led to clear targets for improvement. In summer 2007 this resulted in the school's examination targets being reached or exceeded at GCSE, a significant improvement on GCSE results for 2006. The school has worked particularly hard to recruit and train well qualified staff. As a result, leadership and management in English and mathematics have made

a strong contribution to improved standards at GCSE. Additionally, the school's specialist status as a visual and performing arts college has had a positive impact on the girls' confidence and motivation to do well. Nevertheless, some of the school's evaluation and monitoring procedures lack rigour and actions to address weaknesses are not always well co-ordinated. At the present time, there is not enough consistency across the senior management team, nor across heads of student progress and heads of subject areas in analysing data, monitoring teaching and learning and identifying areas for development. The many good practices observed during the inspection are not yet fully shared, so improvements in teaching and learning and standards are sometimes slowed.

The school has a high commitment to meeting the needs of all students and this is reflected in the good progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for whom English is not their first language. Strategies to challenge the more able students to achieve the highest possible examination results are developing, but the performance and aspirations of some students still need to be higher. Parents and carers, except for a very small number, are positive about the work of the school and the care and support their children receive.

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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	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?	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	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	2	

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

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	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Handsworth Wood Girls' Visual and Performing Arts Specialist College, Birmingham, B20 2HL

I would like to thank you for the welcome you gave to my colleagues and me when we visited your school recently. Thank you for talking with us and giving us your views. We were very impressed by your good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.

You are right to be proud of your school. Inspectors have judged the school to be good. It is an inclusive community where different cultures are respected and celebrated. The headteacher's support and care for all members of the school community creates a happy school. A real strength of the school are the relationships between staff and you. You feel safe and enjoy school. Attendance has improved. You make good progress and GCSE results continue to improve and are well above the national average. More of you are now achieving better at GCSE in English and mathematics. The school provides good care and support to help you to do well. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's specialist status in visual and performing arts has provided more opportunities and activities, which you enjoy. The school has given high priority to improving the quality of the lessons you receive and teaching is good.

- There are some things that the school can do to become better; we have asked the headteacher and senior managers to:
- improve collaboration with local schools and colleges to give you more course choices and further improve teaching to raise standards and achievement in the sixth form
- improve the way the school monitors how it is doing, so actions to address weaknesses are more effectively co-ordinated
- use data more effectively to monitor how well you are doing.

Senior managers have a clear view of how the school is doing and where they can make improvements. The managers, teachers, governors and staff are very committed to their work. We encourage you to continue to support the school and play your part in making it even better. On behalf of the inspection team, may I wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

Davinder Dosanjh Her Majesty's Inspector



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Yours faithfully

Davinder Dosanjh
Her Majesty's Inspector