

Formby High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104949
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	308715
Inspection date	8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Susan Wareing 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1015
6th form	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Alex Littlejohn
Headteacher	Mr B Rourke
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2004
School address	Freshfield Road Formby Liverpool Merseyside L37 3HW
Telephone number	01704 873100
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Introduction

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

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, aspects of teaching and learning and the curriculum and of leadership and management. Inspectors collected evidence from lesson observations, assessment data, documentation and discussions with key staff, the vice-chair of governors, the school improvement partner and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Formby High School is situated to the north of Liverpool. It is very popular within the community: there are more applications for places than the school can provide. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is approximately half the national average and most students are of White British origin. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and of those who have a statement of special education need is below average. The school is located in an area of relative prosperity but a significant minority of learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Formby High School's designation as specialist college for performing arts is well established and attracts growing numbers of students from outside its immediate area with an interest and ability in the performing arts. As an Extended School, Formby High School offers services beyond the school day to students and the community. The school has achieved the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the new Sports Mark and Arts Mark Gold awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Formby High School is an outstanding school. It provides a happy learning community in which all students are helped to develop into exceptionally mature, confident and articulate young people, who achieve outstandingly well.

Students enter the school with standards that are above average. During their time in school, they reach exceptionally high standards and make outstanding progress, both in the Year 9 national tests in English, mathematics and science, and in GCSE examinations in Years 10 and 11. There is no significant underachievement at either Key Stage 3 or Key Stage 4 and those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the few students who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as others.

Outstanding teaching contributes significantly to this excellent achievement. Lessons are characterised by very effective planning, with varied activities, high levels of challenge and excellent relationships. Students greatly enjoy the frequent opportunities to work independently of the teacher and discuss the quality of their own and other's work. No teaching observed was less than good, but the school has identified some inconsistency in the helpfulness of marking in some subjects. Systems for target setting and tracking students' progress are very sophisticated and have made a significant contribution to the rapid improvement in achievement over the past three years.

The impact of the school's performing arts status is pervasive, not only in the high performance in the specialist areas of music, drama and dance, but in all subjects. Students learn to express themselves confidently and reflect with great maturity on their feelings and experiences. This helps to equip them exceptionally well to play a very active part in genuine decision making, for example, as members of the very effective school and sports councils. Members have led successful campaigns for water fountains in school, safer travel to and from school and re-designed the sports kits. They take these responsibilities very seriously and are held to account by attendance at governors' meetings. Older students also appreciate opportunities to help younger ones, for example, as reading 'buddies' and sports coaches.

Parents are overwhelmingly delighted with the school. One parent's comment is typical of many received by inspectors during the inspection: 'Thank goodness for the care and interest the school has shown our son. We can't believe the difference in him since he joined the school.' The school works very closely with other agencies to offer students, and often their families, an exemplary level of ongoing care, guidance and support that convinces students that they can achieve well. Procedures for child protection and arrangements for the safeguarding of students are very robust.

The attention paid by the school to informing students about healthy and safe lifestyles is outstanding and contributes to students' great enjoyment of school, demonstrated by their good and improving attendance, excellent behaviour and enthusiastic participation in all that the school has to offer. This includes an outstanding curriculum that caters exceptionally well for the needs of all the students. As well as extensive and very popular opportunities to study music, drama and dance throughout the school, students can take up the challenge of studying separate sciences or two languages. There is also a growing range of vocational options in Years 10 and 11 for all students whose needs are better met by such courses. The rich variety of extra-curricular activities is a strength, including sports and many opportunities to participate in very high quality musical, drama and dance performances in the local community. Students'

cultural awareness is enhanced by direct experience of other cultures, for example, through visits to schools in Kenya and China. The school's work on basic skills and the voluntary community work that many students take up as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, help to prepare learners very effectively for the next stages of their lives.

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding in the impact they have on students' achievement and personal development. The headteacher has a very clear sense of purpose, drive and energy that is shared and complemented by the closely knit senior leadership team. Senior leaders are highly respected by middle managers who feel valued and supported but also challenged. One middle manager reflected a typical point of view in saying, 'Everyone's opinion counts here.' All the staff positively seek continuous improvement. They embody the school's central message of, 'determination to achieve'.

The school's self-evaluation is incisive and has contributed much to its improvement. It involves students, parents, staff and all other partners. This gives the school a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and allows it to intervene swiftly on any underperformance. The process of setting targets is very rigorous. It results in well judged targets which are challenging but achievable and which drive the school forward. The school generally exceeds its targets, including those associated with its performing arts status. The specialist status is very well managed to support an excellent range of partnerships: for example, work with local partner schools and Creative Partnerships to fund, for instance, expert professionals working with subject departments to enhance teaching and learning.

Governance is very effective. The governing body uses the specialist expertise of individual governors to good effect to support and challenge the school management and it plays an active role in taking difficult decisions when necessary. The excellence of leadership and management and the significant improvements since the last inspection, especially in students' achievement, demonstrates its outstanding capacity to improve further and its outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form provision is good. Entry to the sixth form is very inclusive and a significant number of students begin their studies with attainment that is lower than average. The excellent and sensitive care and support that sixth form students receive maintains many in full-time education who would not otherwise engage in further study. During their time in the sixth form, students develop into very well balanced, articulate young people who are very aware of the needs of others in the school community and beyond. They give freely of their time to mentor younger students in mathematics, English and science as well as through sports coaching.

By the end of their sixth form studies, students reach standards that are broadly average. This reflects good progress from their starting points. However, the school has recognised that the demands made on students are not challenging enough. Recent changes to strengthen the management of the sixth form and improve teaching and learning have shown impact, so that teaching is now mostly good. It has some outstanding features but in a minority of lessons teachers do not check regularly enough on students' learning. Tracking and monitoring progress in the sixth form have recently been strengthened and are now better aligned with the main school. Inspection evidence shows that current students are making good progress and are very well prepared for further study and employment.

The curriculum offers a rich choice of subjects that meet the needs and aspirations of the full range of students. They enjoy an extensive menu of extra-curricular activities that is frequently reviewed and extended. Students particularly value the induction arrangements into Year 12 which include a two-day residential course at a local university that helps students settle quickly into sixth form life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop a wider range of strategies for the earlier identification of underperformance in the sixth form.

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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	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?	1	2
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?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
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	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 would like to thank you, on behalf of my colleague and myself, for the very warm welcome you all gave us when we visited your school during its recent inspection. I am very pleased to tell you that we found your school to be outstanding. We would particularly like to thank all those of you who gave up part of your lunch-time to tell us how you feel about your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you and other students whom we met in lessons and around the school.

We know how much you enjoy all that the school offers, because of your good and improving attendance, excellent behaviour and the many after school activities that you are involved in. You told us how much you value taking part in the very wide range of sports, musical, drama and dance activities that the school provides. It was good to hear that nearly all Year 7 students appeared in the Christmas pantomime and that although many of you at Formby High School have a special talent, there is room for everyone to take part.

We saw the great confidence and maturity that you develop, which helps those of you in the main school to achieve excellent standards in your work. In the sixth form you achieve well. Teaching is outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. You have a wide range of subjects to choose from in the main school and the sixth form and outstanding support. All of these things contribute greatly to your success. The progress that you make during Years 7 to 11 is outstanding. It is good in the sixth form. The school also works hard to give you experience of young people from different cultures, for example, on visits to schools in Kenya and China.

You have a real sense of responsibility towards each other. It was a pleasure to see how keen you are to look after younger students, for example, by helping them to improve their reading or by sports coaching. We were also very impressed by what you have achieved for yourselves and your fellow students through the school and sports councils: for example, the Travel Plan that makes your journey to school safer, water fountains and changes to sports kits.

Over the past few years, standards in the sixth form have not been as high as in the main school and the school has recently made some changes to ensure that those of you in Years 12 and 13 achieve as well as you can. The staff have worked hard to improve teaching and learning and have begun to give you clearer targets, just as you had in the main school, to help you improve your work. This has already begun to take effect.

We have asked the school to:

- Find more ways of identifying as soon as possible those sixth form students who are not making the best progress they can, so that they can be helped more quickly.

Thank you once again, on behalf of the inspection team, for your help during the inspection and best wishes for your future studies at Formby High School.