

Philips High School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 105360 |
| Local Authority | Bury |
| Inspection number | 308841 |
| Inspection dates | 4–5 February 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Mike McLachlan |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 866 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr A Walton |
| Headteacher | Mr C Trees |
| Date of previous school inspection | 12 January 2004 |
| School address | Higher Lane Whitefield Manchester M45 7PH |
| Telephone number | 0161 351 2200 |
| Fax number | 0161 796 3445 |

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Philips High School is a 'mathematics and computing' specialist college. It is smaller than average and admits students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average and the full ability range is represented. The number of students in receipt of free school meals is average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, including those whose first language is not English, is below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with a statement of special educational need is also broadly average. The school is a designated centre for physically disabled students. It is in receipt of a number of awards, including the Healthy Schools Award and the National Sportsmark Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that has used its specialist college status effectively to ensure that all students achieve well given their initial starting points and particularly in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). The school provides good value for the money.

The school limits the range of examinations to ensure overall better pass rates. Consequently, virtually all students achieve at least five passes at GCSE. Standards at GCSE in English, mathematics and ICT are significantly above average. Science results, while improving in the Year 9 tests, remain below average at GCSE. A significant strength is the rapidly growing number of students at the end of Year 11 reaching above average standards in five or more A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics in 2007. More ambitious targets have been set for the current students.

Personal development and well-being is good. Students enjoy school, have good attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons and around the school. They say they feel safe and valued in the school community. Attendance is average, an improvement from the previous inspection, due to the rigorous monitoring that is now in place. Students demonstrate good attitudes towards active and healthy lifestyles and take responsibility to support each other and the wider community through, for example, the prefect system, the buddy support for younger students and the many charitable works. The students' well developed interpersonal skills, the very good provision for enterprise education and their above average standards in literacy, numeracy and ICT prepare them well for employment, training or further education.

Teaching and learning are good. In most lessons, teachers use a variety of teaching styles, the pace of learning is brisk and activities are well matched to students' abilities and particular needs. For example, in an excellent mathematics lesson, the teacher stretched students' understanding by expert and challenging questioning and, as a result, all students, including those in the class with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, gained confidence and made rapid progress.

Overall, the curriculum is good and is enhanced by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Students talked and wrote movingly about their trip to Japan, for example. The curriculum is developing to meet the needs and interests of all students through the introduction of additional GCSE courses and a growing number of vocational courses, although the numbers taking the latter are very small. The current school development plan has an aim to adapt the curriculum to make it even more relevant to all individual students' needs. However, the action plans to achieve this have not yet been fully formulated. The care provided by the school to all students is strong and reflects its inclusive nature. A particular strength is the special provision for students with disabilities, who are given every opportunity to take part in all the school offers. They participate enthusiastically and achieve well.

Leadership and management are good. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The good, supportive leadership of the headteacher is complemented well by a recently extended and strengthened senior team. Middle leadership is good and developing and is now a key strength of the school. They enjoy being more accountable for quality and standards in their respective departments. The specialist college aspects of the work of the school are particularly well managed. This status is benefiting the whole school, particularly in the extent to which it is improving standards in the key skills and improving the quality and use of up-to-date ICT

equipment across the school. The governing body continues to support but also challenges the school in useful ways. The school has a good capacity to improve further, demonstrated, for example, by how it tackled the issues left at the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall points score achieved by students in GCSE and vocational examinations and raise standards in science in Years 10 and 11.
- Develop and implement an action plan to meet the school's aspiration to expand the curriculum to make it even more relevant to individual students' needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school sets challenging targets and inspection evidence indicates that progress is good. Good teaching, very effective collaboration between departments and rigorous monitoring and tracking of progress results in students reaching above average standards in five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Standards reached in science have been below the school's expectations and an intensive programme of support has already begun to bear fruit in Years 7 to 9. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2007 were above average in science as well as English and mathematics and this represented good achievement. However, the school was disappointed in the outcomes in science at GCSE and is rightly continuing the intensive support at this level. Students from minority ethnic groups make good progress. Very good support for students with learning difficulties and particularly for the students with disabilities ensures that they make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Good opportunities are provided for students to take responsibility. The school council is especially effective, for example, their suggestion for the provision of water rather than fizzy drinks was acted upon by the school. Students are taking a key role in establishing a 'drop-in centre' to provide confidential advice and support for students. The excellent school newspaper, produced by students, gives many examples of their achievements and successes and illustrates admirably why they say they feel proud of their school. Students actively consider healthy living issues and how to keep themselves safe. A high participation in sports activities illustrates their enjoyment in and understanding of the importance of keeping fit. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Regular assemblies are used well to examine ideas around the thought and prayer for the week. Students have a good awareness of what is right and wrong. Students' personal development is strongly supported by both the formal and the wider curriculum. They develop a good understanding of their own and other cultures, which is enhanced by excellent links with and visits to other countries such as Japan. Attendance is average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Planning is generally of a high standard and students know what they have to do and why. This approach was particularly evident in an outstanding lower-ability English group where students

could describe important elements of *The Tempest* and the effect these had on the plot. Outstanding lessons are characterised by very active learning and high quality questioning. In the few satisfactory lessons seen, learning was less secure because the challenge and expectations were less demanding. The use of teaching assistants is very effective and students gain confidence from their support. This is particularly true for the students with physical difficulties who are enabled to take an active part in all lessons. Students generally understand their targets and are clear on what they have to do to make further progress. For example in English, teachers' comments not only identify what level the students are working at but also what they need to do to reach the next level. Use of data to track students' progress is well developed in many subjects and this good practice is being extended to all subjects in this academic year.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good lower school curriculum is enhanced by the opportunity for most students to study two languages. In Years 10 and 11 there is a broad choice of traditional GCSE subjects and a good range of vocational courses. However, only a very small number of students take advantage of these vocational opportunities. The school aims to improve further the relevance of the curriculum but plans are not yet in place to fully address this intention. Students benefit from a very good and carefully planned life skills programme which is well supported by local external partners. The specialist status has had a very positive impact, improving ICT facilities and beginning to modernise the way teachers work and the way students learn. Students enjoy a wide range of challenging enterprise activities and learning that enables improved understanding of the world of work. There is an excellent range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Students value these opportunities and rates of participation are high. Over half of students take part in physical recreational activities, for example. Many visits within the United Kingdom and abroad promote multicultural understanding and cross-curricular links that extend students' learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Regular monitoring of students' progress, attitudes and behaviour ensures that the school intervenes early when there are any concerns. Good support systems are in place through school staff and through effective links with external agencies. The well led learning mentor team is especially effective in promoting students' self-esteem and helping those in their care to improve. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and therefore make good progress. Good links with primary schools ensure that transition to high school is smooth and this work is enhanced by activities through the school's specialist status. Challenging targets are set and teachers provide good guidance on what students need to do to improve. Parents are well informed about progress, rewards, sanctions and attendance through the excellent and innovative school 'e-portal' Internet site and through regular reports and review days. However, a number of parents suggested they would value more opportunities to talk to subject teachers. The school has good plans in hand to address this concern. Child protection procedures are secure. Effective systems are in place to ensure students' safety while on the school site and on organised visits.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides good leadership and is supported well by an able, extended senior team. School development planning rightly concentrates upon improving students' achievement as well as their well-being. Self-evaluation is accurate and increasingly effective in bringing about school improvement. The school's monitoring and evaluation of its work and particularly teaching and learning is challenging but also supportive and encouraging. Consequently, there is a good sense of teamwork and mutual respect between staff and students is strong. School leaders are particularly innovative in the way they are developing and using their management information system to assess students' performance rapidly and target rewards or support precisely. After an extended period of staff turbulence, particularly in science, middle leadership is strong and healthy and show high levels of collaboration and eagerness to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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

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| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| 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

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|---|---|
| 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 | 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| 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

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| 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 | 2 |
| 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

Inspection of Philips High School, Whitefield, M45 7PH

I would like to thank you on behalf of the inspection team for the way you made us so welcome during our recent inspection of the school. We enjoyed talking with you and could see that you act responsibly and are well behaved. We think your excellent newspaper sums up how mature you are and how active you are as citizens in the school and the community. It illustrates really well why you said to us that you feel proud of yourselves and your school.

You go to a good school that has used its specialist college status well to ensure that you all make good progress. We were particularly impressed by the range of enterprise activities you were involved in.

You reach above average standards at the end of Year 11 gaining five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics. Well done! We noted that standards in science have been a concern for the school. Good work has been done so far at Key Stage 3, but we have suggested that there is some more work to be done to improve science in Years 10 and 11.

We think you achieve well in the range of courses you are able to take, although we note that very few of you were considering vocational courses at the moment. We also noted that the school limits the total number of examinations entered so you can do well in the ones you take. We have suggested that it would be helpful if the school reviewed what was made available to you. This is to enable you to take courses most suited to your individual needs and your developing entrepreneurial culture. We agree with you that you are taught well. You are also well cared for and have good support and guidance so that you feel safe in school and are supported to improve further or catch up if needed. Teachers work hard to let you know what you are doing well and what you need to do to improve. The school is well led by your headteacher, other leaders and governors. They know what the school does well and have good plans in hand to bring about further improvements.

Congratulations again for representing your school so well. With your active support and regular attendance you can help your good school become even better.