

Halifax High at Wellesley Park

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107566
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	309434
Inspection date	16 October 2007
Reporting inspector	James Kilner 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	720
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patricia Astwood
Headteacher	Mr Jeremy Waxman, OBE
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Gibbet Street Halifax West Yorkshire HX2 0BA
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Introduction

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

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; the curriculum; personal development and well-being; care, guidance and support; and leadership and management. The inspector gathered evidence from lesson observations, examination of students' work, assessment data, interviews and documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector 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

Halifax High at Wellesley Park is a smaller than average 11 to 16 secondary school. The school exists within a competitive local context with two selective grammar schools in the town. The school has increased in size in terms of facilities and pupil numbers since 2005, when it moved to new premises. The school population is stable. Most students speak English as an additional language: approximately 10% of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is over three times the national average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high, although those with a statement of special educational need is in line with the national average. Students' attainment on entry is below the national average.

The school holds specialist status in languages and performing arts (2005) and has achieved Investors in People (2005).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Halifax High at Wellesley Park is an outstanding school. At the heart of this success is the rigour with which strategic leadership and management are conducted at all levels. This, coupled with the specialist school status in languages and performing arts, moves the school from strength to strength. Standards of fluency in spoken and written English, a weakness in the last inspection, have been transformed into strengths. Equally, the proportion of students gaining higher levels in national tests and examinations has also improved since the last inspection.

The two strands of specialist status in languages and performing arts encourage students to develop their fluency in communication. By the time students leave in Year 11, their oracy skills are exemplary and on a par with other students in the area. To this end the school permeates the curriculum with planned opportunities to practice and develop fluency in spoken English. A wealth of opportunities is provided for students to demonstrate their proficiency in fluency. Assemblies provide one of the platforms for students to demonstrate their skills. One such assembly, delivered by a group of Year 10 students on Amnesty International and animal rights, challenged the views of their peers through the dramatic portrayal of moving and hard hitting messages, eliciting spontaneous applause. Performance goes well beyond the school into the town of Halifax, with students undertaking joint performances with neighbouring schools which serve a variety of social and cultural mixes. The result is that students become confident, articulate and highly motivated young people with the common aspiration to achieve well in all they do.

The school seeks to dispel the stereotypes surrounding the traditional choices for students in schools facing challenging circumstances. Languages are an important part of Halifax High's curriculum, with over 90% of students continuing to study languages until Year 11. The school offers Arabic and Urdu courses alongside popular European modern foreign language courses. Students eagerly and enthusiastically participate in all lessons, becoming fluent in spoken English and foreign languages. The school resoundingly achieves its mission statement goal of 'expression, fluency, performance' for all students.

Performance art is not only a feature of the curriculum but also forms part of the continuing professional development of all teachers. Staff are trained by arts faculty leaders in teaching techniques designed to increase teacher confidence in classroom management. As a result, group discussion and peer appraisal are now common features of good and outstanding lessons.

Standards attained by students are satisfactory and their achievement is good. The majority of students enter Year 7 with below average standards. A thorough sub-level analysis of their achievement from primary school together with cognitive ability testing identifies appropriate intervention. Between Year 7 and Year 9 the progress made by students in all subjects is good and improving. Significant progress was made in both English and mathematics in 2006. Boys achieve higher standards than girls, especially in mathematics and science. Girls achieve higher standards in English. The school now provides some single sex teaching to eradicate this discrepancy in achievement.

The progress made in science improved in both 2005 and 2006 with the provisional results for 2007 the highest ever. Between Year 7 and Year 11 students make consistently above average progress in all subjects. The percentage of students who leave the school with five A* to C grades (including English and mathematics) has increased slightly. Provisional results for 2007

indicate that all groups made good progress. Progress in mathematics is improving and in English it is consistently above average.

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students respect one another and appreciate each other's cultures. Relationships between staff and students are very positive. Good humour and mutual respect are deeply embedded in the ethos of the school. Students have a good level of attendance and their enjoyment of their education is tangible in the strong work ethic they maintain, along with their commitment and pride when speaking about their school. They thoroughly enjoy coming to school. Students' behaviour in school is good and this has a positive impact on their learning. Due to the school's proactive approach to behaviour management, there have been no exclusions since September 2007. Students are supported through the behaviour management system to make positive choices and to succeed. The simple, but effective, and consistently applied rewards and consequences model promotes the students' well-being. Students enjoy lessons, especially the structure of the Halifax High lesson. They appreciate the opportunity to take responsibility, for example through the peer anti-bullying scheme, the school council and house system. The latter supports the students' academic, moral and social development by tracking and monitoring progress. Students have an understanding of the need to be healthy, although not all of them take advantage of the healthy food on offer.

Students are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the local community, an opportunity they embrace enthusiastically. For example, many join the Junior Street Wardens Scheme where they are trained by council staff in being the 'eyes and ears' of the community. This initiative has led to a reduction in litter and anti-social behaviour in the area. There are a wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer which are well supported by all students. The specialist school status, through the focus on fluency, is equipping its students for their lives beyond Year 11.

Teaching and learning are good and examples of outstanding teaching were seen during the inspection. All teaching is exemplified by the consistent use of the model lesson plan: the Halifax High lesson. Not only do teachers ensure all students understand the lesson objectives, they regularly check students' understanding and are prepared to adapt the lesson to accommodate individual needs. Highly skilled faculty assistants unobtrusively and effectively support students with additional needs in order that the pace of lessons never falters. Students are adept at assessing their own work against their individual targets, as well as the work of their peers against the lesson objectives. Behaviour management is good and used consistently so that students know the boundaries, consequences and rewards. Students achieve well and enjoy the exciting challenges set by the teachers.

Where appropriate, students are carefully guided to single sex teaching, vocational groups and ability setting, ensuring that progress in lessons is never less than good. Early identification of vulnerable and potentially disaffected groups in Year 7 has led to the provision of an accelerated group following a more primary based teaching format. Through this careful and targeted nurturing, the school provides individual support so that, from the outset, no student is in danger of failing at Halifax High School.

The curriculum is good and matches learners' needs well. Following a review, the Key Stage 3 curriculum has been changed to reduce the number of teachers with whom students have contact in a given week. The outcome has been to provide additional daily teaching time for Year 7 English to support the high number of students with English as an additional language. Specialist school status facilitates an increase in creative arts time to support expression, fluency and performance.

At Key Stage 4, the curriculum design consists of three strands. Academic and vocational courses offer opportunities to gain Level 2 accreditation through GCSEs and Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC). For less academic and vulnerable students a third, support strand, incorporates the use of the arts to assist in developing students' key skills and emotional awareness. As part of the school's commitment to inclusion, a wider vocational programme incorporates a package linked with broader out-of-school experience for a small number of students. For example, a module in physical education is allowing a small group of students in danger of disaffection to develop their Karate skills as part of their GCSE assessment. Within each of these strands the curriculum meets the needs of many of the students. However, a lack of flexibility means that a personalised approach, similar to that used to support some of the vulnerable students, is currently not available for all students.

Specialist school status allows for a full programme of enrichment which includes diverse sporting activities, drama, film production and street dance. All enrichment activities are well attended. Through their language specialism the school provides opportunities for students to visit Spain, Italy and India, with plans well advanced for links with Pakistan.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Child protection procedures are firmly in place and meet statutory requirements. The school's house system encourages the development of the whole child. The transition arrangements for students into Year 7 and Year 10 are outstanding, because they receive mentoring support and guidance through the house system.

Through a series of team building programmes and competitive events the ethos in the school is one of an extended family where all students feel they belong and feel safe. House leaders play a key role as advocates for the students in their houses, often brokering support and guidance when young people face troubled times. Students display a tremendous loyalty to their allocated house, appreciating the friendly team rivalry encouraged through sporting and social events. The highly effective academic tracking and monitoring system is understood by students and is appreciated by them in guiding them to the higher levels. The system is consistently applied across the school and has contributed to the good progress made by all students. Parental involvement in the school is encouraged, with frequent contact, especially in Year 9 and Year 11. A rigorous pastoral system identifies those at risk and the school has put in place programmes to cater for their needs.

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. Already recognised as an outstanding leader through local and national awards and the previous inspection, the headteacher has not rested on his laurels. Through expert coaching, training and staff appointments he has been systematic in ensuring that his exemplary skills are now a feature of all leaders and managers in the school. The result is that subject leadership is highly effective in driving up standards in all subjects of the curriculum. The role of house leader in scrutinising the progress of their students alongside the subject leaders and house tutors ensures that no student slips through the net. The wealth of data and highly effective tracking systems in place ensure that challenging targets linked to the specialist school status are set, achieved and in some cases exceeded. Governors provide a strong level of challenge to the school, regularly scrutinising results and trends in performance. They have played a crucial role in the recent move to new purpose-built premises. They fulfil all statutory duties admirably and are increasingly representative of the school community. Given the astute and effective deployment of additional funding and resources, together with the positive impact of specialist school status, the school gives excellent value for money. There is an outstanding capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to provide more flexible and personalised pathways for all students.

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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
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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
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

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

The quality of provision

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?	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
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
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	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

Halifax High at Wellesley Park, Halifax, HX2 OBA.

Thank you for welcoming me to your school during the recent inspection. It was a pleasure to talk to you about your learning and your views of the school. You are rightly proud of your school and its house system. I agree with you that Halifax High at Wellesley Park is an outstanding school.

Here are some of the things which make your school stand out from the rest:

- the leadership and management of your school is first rate, everybody knows what they need to do to improve things for you and they work closely together to achieve this
- the specialist school status provides some unique opportunities for you to achieve full fluency in your spoken English by the time you leave school
- the care, guidance and support you receive is excellent. You show a tremendous loyalty to your house system and enjoy the friendly competition which it provides
- standards are going up, you are well taught and you are on target to achieve in all you do
- you behave well and respect one another
- all the adults in school have great respect and admiration for all you are achieving
- there are lots of activities and options to promote healthy living for you - perhaps more of you could try the healthy options available for you at lunchtimes!

The curriculum you follow is good and, for some of you, there is flexibility in the options you can choose and the subjects to follow in Years 10 and 11. We have asked the school to find ways for more of you to have this flexibility of choice to study a wider range of courses.

You and your parents are quite right to be proud to attend such a wonderful school. I know that you will want to find ways that you can help to keep it that way and maybe make it even better!!