

The North Halifax Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107574
Local Authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	309436
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Clive Moss HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1070
6th form	295
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jacqueline Kershaw
Headteacher	Mr Graham Maslen
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 1999
School address	Moorbottom Road Illingworth Halifax West Yorkshire HX2 9SU
Telephone number	01422 244625
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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

The North Halifax Grammar School is a larger than average 11-18 selective school located on the northern boundary of Halifax. It draws students from a wide area. The proportion of students attending the school eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also much lower than the national average. A small proportion of students are from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The school is designated a specialist science college. The school has achieved a number of awards including Investors in People, the Artsmark and the Quality Standard for Careers Education and Guidance.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The North Halifax Grammar is a good school. It has sustained very high standards over several years. Students make good progress. They develop into confident and articulate young people as a result of the many and varied opportunities provided within the curriculum. There are no major differences between the progress made by different groups of students at the school. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those from Black and minority ethnic groups and the gifted and talented do equally as well as their peers.

Students' behaviour is good. Instances of bullying and racism are remarkably few. Students are clear that neither is tolerated and confident that it is dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Relationships between the different groups of students are harmonious. The vast majority of students feel safe and are happy at the school. They enjoy learning and respond enthusiastically to the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer.

Most parents are justifiably very positive about the school and many wrote glowing endorsements of the education it provides. Many are understandably concerned about the quality of the school's accommodation and provision for information and communication technology (ICT). Nevertheless, the school provides a broad and challenging curriculum which enables students to learn and develop as people, assisted by good care, guidance and support. Teaching is predominantly good, but does not always ensure that all students are challenged sufficiently, commensurate with their high levels of ability.

The headteacher makes excellent use of detailed data and management information about the performance of the school to inform self-evaluation and planning for improvement, including setting challenging targets. He communicates a clear and unequivocal vision for the continued improvement of the school and enjoys the support of a committed leadership team in making this happen. Governors are well informed about the performance of the school and carry out their duties effectively. Middle leaders have a good understanding of the strategic priorities. Daily routines are effective and carried out efficiently.

The school has made particularly effective use of its specialist status to improve the quality of its provision in science and mathematics and raise attainment in these subjects. It has made good use also of external benchmarks and awards such as Investors in People, the Artsmark and Careers Education and Guidance standards to improve the quality of its work. These developments have also been used to good effect in sharing expertise with other local schools. Good account is taken of the views of students and parents when making decisions about changes and improvements to the school, although a small minority of parents believes this is not so and students are not always clear about how their views have led to changes.

Funding of the school is comparatively low. This limits the extent to which improvements in accommodation can be made and places particular burdens on the capacity of the senior leadership team. Despite these difficulties, the school has taken effective steps and made progress since the last inspection, but has been unable to resolve issues in the leadership and management of ICT. The school provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form provision is good. A high proportion of students stay on from the main school, but others join from different schools. Students achieve well and standards are well above average.

Students' personal development is outstanding. This is reflected in their mature attitudes to learning and what they need to do to be successful. The students feel both a part of the school, to which they continue to make a significant contribution, as well as having a distinct identity as a sixth-former. There is an excellent range of subjects available and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These contribute, along with good teaching and learning, to high retention rates and almost all students go on to higher education. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure sufficient challenge for all students in all lessons.
- Improve the provision for ICT.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' attainment on entry to the school is well above average. They make good progress and reach standards well above average by the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4, and in the sixth form. At least 99% of students have attained five or more higher grade GCSEs in each of the last three years, including English and mathematics, and almost all subjects recorded a significantly higher than average proportion of A*/A grades than the national average. The extent to which students achieve above the national averages increases from Key Stage 2 to 3 and again at Key Stage 4. The school has accurately identified that, despite the significantly higher than average proportions of students attaining A*/A grades, its own data reveal that the proportion is lower than student level data predicts. Boys' average points per entry at 'A' level is well below that of girls. Some 96% of students in the sixth form complete their AS levels. 89% of students in the sixth form stay on to complete their A levels.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students have very positive views of their school. Their attendance is excellent. Very high numbers are involved in extra-curricular activities that make a significant contribution to their social and cultural development. The school places an equally strong emphasis on their spiritual and moral development, to good effect. A large proportion of students are involved in charitable works, particularly in the sixth form, giving significant amounts of their time, for example, to working as Millennium Volunteers. Sixth form students are frequently involved in coaching and mentoring students from lower age groups. Students readily adopt safe practices, for example when using the Internet and in practical lessons. They have been involved in decisions to make healthy snacks available in the tuck shop, which supports the school's work towards the Healthy Schools standard. The high levels of attainment they reach, along with the opportunities they are given to experience the world of work, mean they are prepared well for leaving school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

In the majority of lessons teachers have clear learning objectives that tell students what they will learn and what they need to do to achieve a particular grade or level. At the end of the lesson they check what students have learned. In these lessons there is a range of interesting activities and purposeful questioning to challenge students and extend their thinking. Such lessons have a brisk pace, which leads to good behaviour and attitudes, and enables students to make good progress. Teaching assistants are used well to support the small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This ensures that these students make good progress. In less successful but nonetheless satisfactory lessons, the work provided is not sufficiently challenging for all students, which slows the progress they make. Students comment correctly that marking of their work is inconsistent and not always helpful in telling them how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is designed well to ensure that it provides students with a high level of academic challenge. It is adapted to allow students who are ready to take GCSE examinations early, with good results. There is a good range of subjects available at Key Stage 4, but this does not meet in full the interests of a minority of students. In the sixth form, the curriculum is enhanced by courses provided through Campus Calderdale and links with a local university to ensure that the needs and interests of all students are met. There have been good improvements in provision for citizenship since the last inspection. Despite the best efforts of the school, however, there has only been limited progress in ICT. The curriculum is augmented by a wide range of activities that capture the interest of students, including residential and work experience, enterprise days and management conferences. There is an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities that make a significant contribution to students' enjoyment of the school and their achievement. Difficulties with accommodation limit the school's ability to provide fully for practical activities and studies.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Key members of staff know the students well and are aware of their needs and how to provide for them. Support for vulnerable students, including looked-after children, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is both sensitive and effective. The school works well with outside agencies, such as the careers service. Health and safety procedures are carried out regularly and all necessary child protection and safeguarding requirements are met. Policies to ensure equal opportunities are in place. A good personal, social and health education programme is effective in supporting students' personal and emotional development. Students are given good support when they move into the school and sixth form, and subsequently to move on

to future education and employment. They are enabled to fit in easily and settle quickly. Comprehensive processes for tracking students' progress enable students to know the levels they have achieved previously and to set challenging targets. Parents are kept informed of students' progress and are involved promptly if there is any underachievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's self-evaluation processes are effective and lead to accurate judgements. Senior leaders monitor the work of the school carefully and operate well established structures for performance management. The school has been successfully re-assessed for the Investors in People standard three times. They are supported well by an effective governing body. Departmental reviews, led by senior staff, involve work sampling, pupil interviews and lesson observations, and are effective in identifying further areas for improvement. The necessarily high teaching commitment of senior leaders means that they are working at full capacity. As a result, progress in completing equalities plans has been slow. Middle leaders are effective in leading and managing their areas of responsibility. The school has used its specialist status very effectively to improve accommodation, the curriculum, the attainment of students and its links with the local community.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	1
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	1	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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	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	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	1	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of The North Halifax Grammar School, West Yorkshire, HX2 9SU

Thank you for talking to me and my colleagues and making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We spoke with you in lessons, around the school and in groups, looked at your work, read the results of questionnaires filled in by your parents/carers and spoke with some of your teachers. Here is a summary of our main findings, which I hope will be of interest to you.

- The North Halifax Grammar is a good school. It is very popular with you and your parents.
- You make good progress and reach very high standards. This is the result of the challenging curriculum with which you are provided.
- Your attendance is excellent.
- You enjoy the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, including in the sixth form. These make a significant contribution to your personal development.
- Key members of staff have good knowledge of your needs and ensure those of you who need extra support get it.
- The headteacher and the staff at the school have a good understanding of what needs to be done to make things even better.
- You are taught well, but some of you rightly think that some lessons could be more challenging. We have asked the headteacher and staff to ensure that all of you are challenged appropriately in all lessons.
- The school has found it difficult to make as much progress as is needed with ICT. We have asked the headteacher to improve the provision for this.

Many of you already make an important contribution to the school and I am sure you will want to do everything you can to support the staff in making The North Halifax Grammar an even better school.