

The Mirfield Free Grammar and Sixth Form

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107764
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	309501
Inspection date	7 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Linden Phillips 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	1409
6th form	327
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Ryan
Headteacher	Mrs L Barker
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Kitson Hill Road Mirfield West Yorkshire WF14 9EZ
Telephone number	01924 483660
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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 one Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, particularly in English; the quality of teaching and learning; and the guidance offered to students moving on to post-16 learning and work. Inspectors gathered evidence from: observing lessons; speaking with staff, students and school partners; scrutinising documentation; and questionnaires completed by parents. 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

The Mirfield Free Grammar and Sixth Form is a larger than average 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school. There has been an increase in the numbers attending, particularly in the sixth form. Around a quarter of the students are of minority ethnic heritage and a higher number than average speak English as their second language. There is a slightly higher than average number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and with statements of special educational need. The school has maintained specialist status since 1995 and current specialist subjects are: design and technology, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology. The school has achieved the Healthy Schools award (Gold Standard), Investors in People status, Careers Quality Standard award and Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Mirfield Free Grammar and Sixth Form is a welcoming and inclusive comprehensive school. It was judged as very good at its last inspection and is now an outstanding school where students flourish and achieve well.

Students working at all levels make very good progress while at the school: considerably better than in similar schools across the country. Students from different ethnic backgrounds perform similarly well. In 2007, the percentage of Year 11 students who gained five or more GCSE passes at A* to C was well above local and national averages. The school has also been highly successful in ensuring that the proportion of students gaining qualifications in English and mathematics is much better than it is nationally. These results are part of a continuing upward trend, and the school's monitoring indicates that there will be further improvements in 2008. The school points to beneficial effects of specialist status in the setting of targets and raising expectations which have contributed to these and other marked improvements.

Progress made by students during Key Stage 3 is slower than at Key Stage 4 and so the school is focusing on students' learning in Years 7, 8 and 9. Attainment in English is around the national average at the end of Key Stage 4, but progress is less good than in other subjects. This has reflected a number of departmental difficulties and the school has given considerable time and effort to analysing students' progress and making appropriate changes to teaching, personal support and to aspects of the English curriculum. The measures are well founded and the school is confident that students are now making better progress.

The school is outstanding in promoting and ensuring students' personal development and well-being. Child protection arrangements are in place and supported by staff training. Students have contributed to discussions which have resulted in improvements to the timings of breaks and lunch and to the menus on offer. The school also supports students in the take-up of a healthy lifestyle by encouraging participation in the many sporting opportunities offered. The students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is excellent. One observed tutorial was part of a well planned sequence which gave students opportunities to consider their roles and responsibilities as British citizens, to take time for personal reflection and to consider how to improve their work and achievements. Students were enthralled at a reading from Doris Lessing about learning from her life and were then able to use their own experiences to understand how a group of children in Africa shouldered new responsibilities. The school's focus on mutual respect and understanding is mirrored by students who say that they are safe and happy in school. Students know what to do if they see or experience bullying, but it is rare because it is dealt with quickly and firmly. Students of different ethnicity agreed that there are almost no instances of racial bullying. The school's policy on racial equality is used to promote harmony and the log of racial incidents indicates that such issues are managed effectively. Over a third of parents wrote to the inspection team. The large majority were overwhelmingly positive. There were many comments about the improvements brought about by the behaviour policy and the linked praise and reward system. Parents appreciate the regular information about their children's progress. Typical comments included: 'Mirfield Free Grammar really seems to develop a child as a whole, and my child is becoming a very confident and well-rounded person'; and 'The school provides a caring, happy environment in which children learn well and flourish as individuals. I recommend the school highly!'

The school has been developing its 'Behaviour for Learning' policy for some years. In discussion, many students cited the policy as having made the largest improvement to school life. Parents are involved and informed and there is now a common expectation of excellent behaviour. A very small number of parents are aware of some lapses but, overall, students at The Mirfield Free Grammar show exemplary behaviour - both in their classrooms and around the school. Students are extremely positive about their school and their enjoyment is reflected in attendance which is above the national average.

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with some being outstanding. The school's systems for improving teaching are thorough with a strong emphasis on helping students learn effectively, which is reflected in the good progress they make. At the same time there remain inconsistencies in how well all staff mark work and keep assessment records. The school has responded to the last inspection report with a strong focus on independent learning. Assessment is increasingly informing staff to help students know what they need to do to improve their work. The school has identified areas where teaching should be improved so that it is more effective in promoting confident learning.

The school has been developing its curriculum for some years and provides its students with an excellent range of subjects and choices. Specialist status has been used to improve resources to support learning. The school uses its information about how well students are learning to adapt the curriculum so that students can be offered a personalised programme of study. The school is successful in meeting the needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and of those who are gifted and talented. So, for example, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities progress as well as their peers. The school offers many activities and clubs outside school which enrich and enliven students' experience. Participation is monitored carefully and this ensures that all students are supported and encouraged to take a full part in the life of the school.

The school consistently exceeds its aspirational targets. The system for gathering and analysing individual progress, 'Creating Futures', is a powerful and effective means of providing detailed information. This information is linked quickly and clearly to actions taken by staff who intervene and support students experiencing difficulties. Parents receive a summary of their child's progress every half term. This support and guidance from the school is very effective in encouraging students to achieve of their best. The care students receive is outstanding.

The headteacher sets high aspirations for all students and shares a clear vision with staff. The school celebrates its success but is not complacent and recognises areas which can still be improved. The partnership between the school and its governors is a powerful one. The incisive chair of governors leads a well informed and thoughtful governing body which is extremely well organised and whose members are not afraid to speak their minds and hold the school firmly to account.

Rigorous self-assessment and a focus on high standards, combined with a shared commitment to provide the best care for its students, means that the school has an excellent capacity to improve still further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education. It is increasingly popular and numbers have increased rapidly. Standards reached vary between courses but are broadly average overall. Students make good progress given their starting points. Relationships between staff and students are

very good. The school ensures that students' personal development is excellent and students spoken with were extremely positive about their life and work in the sixth form. The school works hard to include students with a wide spectrum of prior attainment, and they generally make more than expected progress. Teachers give very clear guidance as to how students can improve their work. The curriculum offers a broad range of courses at Levels 2 and 3; even so, some students are studying courses not wholly suitable for them and the school is making further additional adaptations drawing on its partnerships with other educational providers. The strategic direction for the expanded sixth form is impressive and matched by detailed management structures. Leadership is well informed and focused on improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement in English in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Enhance teaching and learning further so that more teaching is outstanding.
- Ensure that sixth form courses are matched more carefully to students' educational needs and career progression.

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?	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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
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?	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	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?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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?	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	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	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you very much for your welcome when we visited to inspect your school. We were very impressed with your enthusiasm and your positive view of The Mirfield Free Grammar and Sixth Form. You told us how much you enjoyed coming to school to meet with friends, take part in clubs and activities and to learn.

We judged your school to be outstanding in its effectiveness in providing you with a rounded education. Your teachers work hard to help you gain high standards and make very good progress. You told us how much your teachers help you to understand what to do to improve your work. You were very appreciative of the large number of out of school activities.

It was interesting that you wanted us to know how much you appreciated the school's 'Behaviour for Learning' programme because you felt that it had made such a difference to behaviour in lessons and around the school generally. On the day we visited we were impressed by your very courteous and helpful behaviour towards each other, your teachers and to us. More than a third of your parents also wrote to us and they were overwhelmingly positive about your school. Some parents indicated that they were aware of some aspects they would like improved but most agreed with the parent who said, 'In such a large organisation the school clearly strives to see my daughter as an individual and recognise her achievements.'

We agree with the school that even though staff have worked very hard to ensure you have an excellent education, there are some things which could be improved still further. We have asked the school to do these things.

- We think that many of you could achieve more in English and we have asked the school to continue to ensure you do.
- You were very appreciative of the way teachers help you, but we agree with the school that more of your lessons could be outstanding.
- Your sixth form is very popular and those of you who spoke with us were very positive about being part of it. However, some of you might achieve more if you had more suitable courses to study and we have asked the school to make sure that this happens.

You can play your part by continuing to work with teachers and staff so that you all achieve of your best.