

The Holt School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110058
Local Authority	Wokingham Borough Council
Inspection number	310191
Inspection date	5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Marcia Headon 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	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1209
6th form	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julia Higgins
Headteacher	Miss Suzanne Richards
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Holt Lane Wokingham RG41 1EE
Telephone number	01189 780165
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. During a one-day visit, the inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards and achievement in the sixth form; the impact of the specialist status and the curriculum offered and how far it suits the needs of learners. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; curriculum and planning documents; observation of the school at work in lessons and break times; discussions with staff and students and three members of the governing body and scrutiny of the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the 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 the report.

Description of the school

The school is a larger than average girls' school which is oversubscribed. It attracts students from in excess of thirty feeder primary schools. Attainment on entry is above the national average. The school has specialist status as a language college and gained the International School's Award in 2005. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of students with learning disabilities and/or difficulties is also well below average: the largest groups of such students have speech and language difficulties, moderate or specific learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. Most students are of White British heritage but there is a small representation from other ethnic groups. Very few students have English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Holt is outstanding in the main school. It is good in the sixth form. One of its most significant strengths is its specialist status as a Language College: students take full advantage of the numerous connections that have been forged with other countries and with the curricular activities linked with this. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and one wrote about the 'definite success culture where our daughter never feels she won't achieve every goal she sets and strives for'. The success of the school is due to the outstanding leadership given by the headteacher and senior staff and the commitment of the whole staff. The school has a tangible sense of purpose. Staff are determined that their students should do as well as they can and because they know them well they ensure that they are given the individual support and guidance which they need.

When students enter the school, they have standards that are above average. Achievement between Year 7 and 11 is excellent and results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science taken at the end of Year 9 are consistently very high. When students leave at the end of Year 11, standards are also well above average with 82% gaining five or more passes at A* to C and 68% gaining five A* to C passes including English and mathematics. Students achieve well above national averages in modern foreign languages. A higher than average percentage of students gained A* and A grades. In 2007, results in mathematics were not as high as in previous years partly due to an early entry policy, which has now been revised. Students with learning difficulties make outstanding progress because of the specific care and attention given to them both in lessons and in highly effective specialist support. Students from minority ethnic heritages achieve as well as others.

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teachers know their subjects well. They treat students fairly, firmly and consistently and lessons are laced with good humour: this generates mutual respect. The pace of lessons is good although in a small minority of lessons students do not make as much progress as they might, as they are not always challenged sufficiently. Most departments use a variety of teaching styles and in modern foreign languages, students used the languages laboratories to good effect. Although much of the work is relevant and stimulating, there is scope for ensuring it is more tightly matched to students' abilities in all lessons. In inclement weather, the quality of learning is affected sometimes by the poor accommodation. Many parental questionnaires commented on the very poor state of the buildings.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They clearly enjoy school and attendance rates are good. They exhibit extremely good behaviour around the site and their outstanding social and moral development is evident in the consideration and thoughtfulness they show towards each other. The extremely positive attitudes to learning are a key factor in the results the girls achieve and in the progress they make during their time in the school. The high participation rates in sport demonstrate how acutely aware students are of the need for a healthy lifestyle. They feel very safe in school and report that any bullying is stopped very quickly. They feel totally confident in the peer mentoring system. Students value the interest that their teachers show in them. One girl said, 'this school is not only about getting good individual grades but looking after the individual'. Students take their responsibilities around the school seriously and enjoy being prefects and mentors. They value the Student Council highly and the importance attributed to their 'student voice'. Year 11 spoke very enthusiastically of the reaction to their request about study leave. Through the House system, students have

raised considerable sums of money for charities both locally, nationally and abroad. The students are developing into mature and responsible adults and are acquiring skills which will equip them very well for the future.

The school has improved the curriculum since the last inspection and it is now good. Courses are tailored to suit different abilities and the vocational curriculum is developing in the main school. The curriculum in the sixth form is more limited. The specialist Language College status has a strong influence on the curriculum and students enjoy diverse activities such as Bastille Day celebrations and Sports Day linked to international countries. They are passionate about the importance of learning about and understanding the culture and customs of other countries. There is a wide range of extra curricular opportunities on offer, and students participate enthusiastically in these.

The care, guidance and support, which the school provides for its students, are outstanding. The school is a highly inclusive community and places a premium on equality of opportunity. Students' academic progress is tracked carefully and through regularly reviewed target setting students know how well they are achieving and how they can improve their work. Very rigorous systems identify and provide support to those who are underachieving. Students with learning difficulties are given exceptional support, which is tailored to their needs. High expectations are set which promotes students' self-esteem. The school has developed a highly effective student support centre that nurtures and guides those who need help. It has good links with external agencies and uses their services to good effect. There is a very low and declining rate of fixed term exclusions. Transition arrangements provide excellent support to new students joining the school. Taster days and links with primary schools are enhanced by the use of a transition page on the school web site.

The headteacher is fully involved in everything that goes on in school and she is highly respected by students, staff and parents. Many echo a comment from one parent that 'the school is very well run with excellent leadership'. The school knows its own strengths and areas for development and its monitoring and self-evaluation procedures are very well structured, thorough and accurate. There is an effective programme of continual professional development and the senior leadership team is a good role model in the way it coaches, mentors and supports staff. A particularly innovative feature is the 'assistant headteacher development' post that not only allows for professional enhancement for the postholder but also allows the school to pursue new projects. The governors take their responsibilities very seriously and fulfil their duties very conscientiously. They are fully involved in all facets of the school's life and hold it to account very tightly questioning and not being prepared to allow 'second best'. Procedures for safeguarding meet current guidelines and the systems in place are very robust. As a result of excellent leadership and management and strong teamwork coupled with a desire for continuous improvement, the school possesses an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is part of a wider Wokingham Federation of Schools, which provides a mainly traditional academic curriculum. The school is aware that it does not provide a full range of post-16 courses. Standards are above average. Students benefit from the introduction of more rigorous tracking systems that ensure that early support is provided for those not working to their potential. Achievement is good. Teaching and learning are also good. The vast majority of students who begin courses complete them.

Students learn in a secure and positive environment. A Year 13 student stated, 'our teachers are always there to guide and praise us'. Students participate eagerly in a very full enrichment programme and are actively involved in the life of the school through leadership of the Houses and the Student Council. They are also effective peer mentors and counsellors who provide a supportive listening ear for younger students. This contributes to the excellent relationships that exist within the sixth form and in the wider school community. The sixth form is led effectively and strategies for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are developing well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the scope of the sixth form curriculum to include a wider range of courses.
- Ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is of a consistently high standard across the school.

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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	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
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	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	2	
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

17 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Holt School, Wokingham, RG41 1EE

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when another inspector and I visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and listening to the obvious pride with which you talked about your school.

We have judged your school to be outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. The standards that you reach in both your standard assessment tests and in your GCSEs are well above national averages. When we considered your standards on entry, we judged that overall you made excellent progress. The sixth form is also good. This is because of the good teaching that you receive. Your behaviour around the site is extremely good and we particularly like the consideration and thoughtfulness you show to one another. We are pleased you are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. We judge that you are developing into mature and responsible adults and are acquiring skills that will equip you well for the future.

You clearly enjoy belonging to a language college and we consider this one of the strengths of the school. You take full advantage of the extra opportunities this brings and we agree with your comments that you felt it was important to experience many different cultures. You told us about the helpful individual support and guidance that staff give to you in your work and we agree with you. Your teachers are committed to ensuring you achieve as well as you can and have a very thorough system for monitoring your performance.

We consider that Miss Richards and her team provide outstanding leadership. The governors also work hard on your behalf. There are two things we think would help the school to become even better and we have asked the school to:

- broaden the scope of the sixth form curriculum to include a wider range of courses
- ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is of a consistently high standard across the school.

We wish you all the best for your future and hope that those of you taking public examinations gain the results you wish.

Yours sincerely,

Marcia Headon

Her Majesty's Inspector