

Herschel Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110103
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	310209
Inspection dates	8–9 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Timothy Gilson

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	845
6th form	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr J Probert
Headteacher	Mr J King-Harris
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2004
School address	Northampton Avenue Slough SL1 3BW
Telephone number	01753 520950
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Herschel Grammar School is an 11 to 18 selective, co-educational school. It is smaller than average with 845 students on roll with 220 in the sixth form. Due to the academic selection of the students, attainment on entry is well above national averages. It is a specialist technology college with 'Leading Edge status'. About a third of the students are of white British background, just under 30% are of Indian origin and just over 21% are of Pakistani background.

The school leads a post-16 consortium with Baylis Court School and Westgate School. As part of the 'Leading Edge' role, Herschel Grammar runs a Key Stage 3 training centre called the Herschel Pupil Training Centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Herschel Grammar School is a good and improving school. The students' personal development and well-being are outstanding due in part to the exceptional care that the students receive. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and hold its leadership in high esteem. 'We are delighted with the school's caring environment and Mr King-Harris' leadership' is a typical comment. The leadership of the school is good and is characterised by a persistent determination to build on the school's sustained improvement. The school has a good capacity to improve further. Students make good progress throughout the school and achieve exceptional and consistently high standards in their GCSE examinations.

Students are rightly proud of their school. They are strikingly self-confident and articulate. Students really enjoy school, which is reflected in their excellent attendance and positive attitudes. The school has a purposeful and calm atmosphere; students respect each other and their teachers and enjoy very positive working relationships. Students are well aware of the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. They make very good use of the school's attractive and award winning grounds at break and lunchtime.

The outstanding curriculum reflects the school leadership team's deep knowledge and understanding of the school and wider community. The school's long-standing specialist technology status has made a good contribution to raising standards. Many students take part in the outstanding range of extra-curricular activities that enrich the life of the school. For example, very large numbers of students are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The school has an outstanding commitment to working with a wide range of partners to enhance the curriculum and support the personal development of students. For example, the Herschel Pupil Training Centre is a model of excellent practice.

Teaching and learning throughout the school are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and students' behaviour is excellent. Lessons include a good range of appropriate activities. The school is in the process of enhancing its system for tracking students' progress in order to identify and target support for students more consistently and rigorously across all subjects.

The leadership team has made effective use of challenging targets to raise standards and it demonstrates a good awareness of the schools strengths and weaknesses. Governors are very supportive of the school, however, the school would benefit from a more robust and challenging approach from them.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Herschel Grammar School sixth form contains many very impressive young people. Students' positive and thoughtful attitudes are a strength. Students are helped to develop into mature young people by the outstanding care, guidance and support they receive from staff. They enjoy the responsibilities available to them such as the community programme in Year 12 and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. They are good role models for younger students. A very high percentage of students stay on to the sixth form and almost all complete their courses. This reflects the impressive range and relevance of the available curriculum and the care and support which students continue to be offered.

Standards are above average and students make good progress overall although achievement across courses varies. Standards are highest in information technology, chemistry and physics.

The quality of teaching is good. Students benefit from individual monitoring and staff know them very well. Advice about future career paths is effective in helping students to make informed choices about their future. There is excellent enrichment of the curriculum for students who have special gifts and interests. The Young Enterprise programme is a particular strength and Herschel Grammar School students' successes have been recognised locally and nationally.

The school has developed the 'Studywiz' virtual learning environment to enable students to become more independent learners and to use private study time more effectively. The supervised private study and other sixth-form facilities are a significant strength.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop more consistent lesson planning and tracking of progress to meet better the needs of all groups of students.
- Provide governor training to enable the governing body to contribute more effectively to school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Because of good teaching, students make good progress throughout their time at Herschel Grammar School although more able students make better progress than the relatively less able. The standards achieved by students are exceptionally and consistently high in Key Stages 3 and 4. Students in the sixth form make good progress and achieve above-average standards.

In this selective school, students enter with standards that are well above national averages. In mathematics, many students in Key Stage 3 make outstanding progress due to highly effective teaching. Progress in English and science is good. In Key Stage 4, students' progress is consistently good. GCSE examination results in 2007, showed that very high proportions of students gained A or A* grades in religious studies, mathematics, design and technology, and information technology.

Very positive relationships between staff and students and good teaching mean that students are able to make good progress in lessons throughout the school. The school is developing its system to allow staff to track students' progress and make appropriate interventions to support individual students.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' outstanding personal development is a real strength of the school. Students bubble over with enthusiasm for their school and all it offers; in lessons, they are enthusiastic and hard working. This is reflected in outstanding attendance levels. Behaviour is exemplary during break and lunchtime; students are not regimented or over-supervised and they behave in a mature and civilised manner. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students show very good understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Sporting activities are very popular with large numbers of students participating in extra-curricular sport. Students enjoy a healthy diet and appreciate the way in which the student body is able to influence the menu in the school canteen through participation in the 'Food Council'. Students feel very

secure in school, regarding it as a safe haven in a complex world, with one explaining that this effect is commonly known as 'the Herschel bubble.' They know that their concerns will be taken seriously and dealt with effectively. In addition, students make it clear that they too show 'zero tolerance' of inconsiderate behaviour. Students have very good opportunities to make a contribution to the school and wider communities. The responsibilities that they undertake increase incrementally as they move through the school and students feel that this is 'just right'. They feel, with pride, that the student voice is influential in the school. Students' well above average numeracy and literacy standards, their well-developed collaborative skills and their participation in enterprise days mean that they are exceptionally well-prepared for the next stage in their education and, ultimately, for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good teaching overall provides a positive atmosphere in which students learn well. Activities in most lessons are well planned to develop understanding while engaging students' interest. Teachers' good subject knowledge helps them encourage students to ask high quality questions so that issues are thoroughly explored in discussion. Some lessons seen were given extra sparkle when students were asked to role-play, compete or take part in practical experiments in order to clarify meaning. Students respond well to good opportunities to think logically and creatively, with encouragement to improve standards through collaboration. Staff increasingly use students' views to inform their planning. Although work is marked regularly, often with information about students' standards, there is less focus on providing written advice for improvement than on recording what has been achieved. The developing tracking system is used well in mathematics and science to record and analyse progress, but is still not consistently applied in all areas. Teachers give regular spoken help and use assessments to identify students who need specific support in lessons. Students therefore know their targets but are less clear when stating what they need to do in order to improve. Teaching approaches are generally matched to the needs of different ability sets. In some lessons seen, however, students who had completed set tasks sat passively waiting for the next stage.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum gives students outstanding opportunities to meet their personal aspirations. Students' views are given considerable weight when developments are planned, with the result that they are very satisfied with the range of provision. Statutory requirements are met in full and supported by very good resources. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively by teachers and students across the school. All students are encouraged to use on-line learning for homework through the new 'Studywiz'. There is effective emphasis on thinking and study skills to support learning in all subjects. Lower school students have exceptionally wide experience of technology due to the specialist technology status.

Core provision at GCSE is broad and supplemented by a flexible option system that matches students' needs well. There are excellent arrangements throughout the school to meet students'

wider needs through the thorough programme of personal, social and health education and the outstanding range of enrichment activities. Students are particularly enthusiastic supporters of opportunities to contribute to the school and wider community, taking responsibility for others, for example as prefects or buddies. Their charities committee organises a highly successful programme of fundraising for their own choices of charities. Creative arts are well served, for example by dramatic and musical performance and the range of physical education activities is exceptionally wide and popular. Subject teachers in all areas provide support, revision and hobby sessions that promote learning. A good range of residential visits broadens students' perspectives. The school's long-standing specialism as a technology college has made a good contribution to raising standards and broadening the curriculum. The school enjoys a wide range of effective local business and community links.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students and parents acknowledge the strength and value of the care, guidance and support they receive. The care that the school demonstrates for its students is outstanding. Students feel secure and trust the adults around them. They say that advice and help is readily available. Child protection and first aid arrangements are effective and robust safeguarding procedures are in place.

The school provides good support and monitoring of those students with specific physical or emotional difficulties. The school's provision for the few students with behaviour difficulties has significantly reduced the number of exclusions. Tutors, heads of year, the counsellor, sixth-form study room supervisor, and other agencies provide excellent pastoral support and guidance. All students have ready access to personal help and advice, not only from adults; younger students are helped by sixth formers specifically trained in this role. 'Pastoral support has been brilliant' said one student who had to be away from school for several weeks - 'without that I would not have succeeded.'

Students are well aware of their target grades and their current levels of attainment but they are not always as clear about what they should concentrate on to do better. The quality of advice and guidance given about courses and pathways to careers is excellent. The school liaises closely with students' parents sharing concerns and also achievements and this very good cooperation has made a positive impact on students' attendance and attitudes. Care and guidance for students in the sixth form is outstanding. Students say that staff know them extremely well and are always on hand to offer support and guidance. They particularly value the support they receive in supervised private study.

The extensive range of work experience open to students in Year 11 provides a valuable insight into the wider world of work, as do the well developed Young Enterprise projects in Year 12 which are widely recognised as being excellent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

A strong sense of cohesion and shared aims characterise the good leadership and management of the school at all levels. Central to the work of the leadership and management team lie the well-being of all students and the raising of achievement and standards. The headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, knows the school very well and is determined to continue to drive improvement, which has been incremental and sustained over a number of years. Middle managers feel well supported and appreciate the fact that they are encouraged to be innovative. They have a developing sense of the full scope of their role in monitoring and evaluating their areas of responsibility, although there is some inconsistency in the confidence and rigour with which departments use the new tracking system. Together, leaders understand the school's strengths and have identified its areas for development. The programme of lesson observations has given them an accurate view of the quality of teaching. However, school improvement planning is not as detailed as it could be.

The governing body is hardworking and dedicated. Governors carry out their duties conscientiously and have the best interests of the school at heart. However, they do not always make enough input into the school's strategic planning. They do not make enough use of the full range of information on the school's performance to enable them to offer robust challenge as well as support. The contribution of the governing body overall is satisfactory. This situation remains unchanged since the previous inspection.

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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?	1	1
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	2
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	1	
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?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

22 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Herschel Grammar School, Slough, SL1 3BW

Thank you for making us so welcome on our recent inspection of your school. It was very clear to us how proud you are of your school and how much you enjoy your education.

Herschel Grammar School is a good school where you make good progress and achieve outstanding standards in your examinations. The school has some outstanding features. Your teachers know you very well and the care provided for you is outstanding. Your attendance at school and your behaviour are excellent. The school provides you with an outstandingly good curriculum and a wide range of extra-curricular activities that you enjoy. Teaching throughout the school is good; your teachers know their subjects well and prepare effective lessons for you. The school is well led; many of you and your parents told us how much you appreciated the leadership of Mr King-Harris and the senior staff.

In order to make the school even better we have asked the school to:

- make sure that your teachers monitor your progress over time more thoroughly and make sure that all of you make the best progress that you can
- help the governing body of the school to contribute more effectively to the school improvement plan.

We are sure that you will continue to work really positively with your teachers and wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Tim Gilson

Lead Inspector