

# Holmer Green Senior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110499
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	310335
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 May 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Nigel Fletcher HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	828
6th form	84
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Robert Bird
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Gilbert
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	18 October 2004
<b>School address</b>	Parish Piece Holmer Green High Wycombe HP15 6SP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 712219
<b>Fax number</b>	01494 711103

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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

Holmer Green Senior School is smaller than average, with a small sixth form. Although the school is situated in a prosperous area, it also takes students from nearby wards recognised as areas of multiple deprivation. Eligibility for free school meals is well below the national average. The school is in a county where there is a selective authority. Consequently, when pupils transfer from primary school their overall attainment is broadly average, but the proportion of very high ability students is lower. The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, and who have English as an additional language, are slightly lower than in most schools. The number of students who have learning difficulties is below average. These include pupils who have academic or social problems. The number of pupils with statements for special educational needs is above average. The school has a Speech and Language Resource base designated by the local authority. The school gained specialist status in business and enterprise in 2006, and has held the Investor in People award since 2002.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Holmer Green Senior School is a good and improving school where students make good progress and develop outstanding personal skills. Parents report favourably on how their children have 'flourished, not only in their work and results, but also in confidence and self esteem'. Standards have improved considerably in the last year. Students made very good progress in their GCSE courses, although their performance in the tests at Key Stage 3 were around average. Students enjoy school and their attendance is good. They speak highly of the good relationships they have with their teachers, and the quality of teaching is good overall. In the best lessons students are active, encouraged to present and discuss their own ideas, and develop independent learning skills. However, in a few lessons, students are insufficiently challenged and not inspired to demonstrate independent thinking.

Led by an inspiring headteacher, the school leadership team provides an excellent strategic direction to improve the quality of education in the school, and to ensure that it is inclusive. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and leaders and managers are fully aware of how well the school is doing. The leadership team has an excellent understanding of its strengths and what is required to improve it further, and has the full support of parents, a committed staff, and a well-informed governing body. It uses resources extremely well. Many parents and students comment on the caring and supportive ethos of the school. One parent commented on being 'struck by the genuine care that seems to be an integral part of the high expectations that teachers have' of the students. Students feel safe and know what to do if they have concerns, confident that they will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Bullying is rare, and instances are dealt with effectively and sympathetically. Younger students speak highly of the success of the Anti-Bullying Committee and the support they receive from older students. Students behave well around the school, although in a small minority of lessons, behaviour can be less than good. Students are well aware of the need for healthy lifestyles and many participate in sports.

The academic curriculum meets the needs of students well, although the school is aware of the need to improve vocational opportunities. It provides an extensive range of additional sporting, academic, cultural and personal enrichment activities in which there is high participation. The school's specialism in business and enterprise pervades the whole curriculum and has an excellent impact on improving learning across the school and preparing students for life after school. Students make an excellent contribution to the local, and wider, community. For example, they speak enthusiastically about providing support in local primary schools, and with charity events, and are rightly proud of how they raised money to help rebuild a school in Kenya.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Students enjoy the sixth form and their behaviour is exemplary. Standards are average, and achievement, which is improving, is now above average due to the good quality of teaching. However, students' progress is variable across subjects. For example, although it is very high in business studies and product design, it is lower than average in physical education. Students' personal development is outstanding, and they enjoy mentoring the younger students. The school provides excellent care and guidance, and students speak highly of the support they receive. The curriculum supports the needs of most students, but its breadth is restricted by low student numbers. As enrolments increase

the school has plans to expand the range of courses. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, as is the capacity for further improvement.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve attainment of students in national tests and examinations, particularly at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form.
- Ensure that the curriculum fully meets the needs and aspirations of all students.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students achieve well overall and reach standards that are above the national average. Most students make good academic progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In the national tests at the end of Year 9, results are around average compared with schools nationally.

Achievement by the end of Year 11 has improved considerably since the previous year, with students now performing well. Boys make better progress than girls, as is seen nationally, and in 2006/07 reached the same standards as girls. GCSE results are above the national average, representing good progress. Attainment at the higher levels at GCSE is good although there is some variation in performance between subjects. The proportion of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades including English and mathematics is above the national average. Almost all students gain five passes at grade A\* to G, and all students gain at least one.

Students' progress against targets is monitored well and underperforming students are identified. For example, extra academic support is provided to high-attaining students whose progress is lower than might be expected. The school analyses the performance of specific groups of learners and takes action to address any differences. For instance, students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well supported and make good progress. As a result, there is little variation between the achievements of different groups.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students are encouraged to cultivate reflective practices and develop a strong moral code. The recent, tragic death of one of their school friends has led to an upsurge in their exploration of spirituality and created a huge desire to raise money to support others who may be suffering. Their overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Strong and harmonious relationships exist between students and staff, and each other. A number of students said, 'We know that every teacher will help us and every student will look out for us.' This is further demonstrated by the Anti-Bullying Committee, set up by students to support those who feel vulnerable.

Behaviour around the school is very good. In the small number of classes where it is less good, it is dealt with effectively. A highly motivated school council is involved in the school's process for review, development and improvement. An equally active sports committee is focused on promoting healthy life styles, and sporting achievement and participation. Although students are fully aware of the need to eat healthily, the inadequate dining facilities hamper progress. Students enjoy being at the school and as a result they attend well. They contribute widely to

the community both in and outside school. For example, students speak enthusiastically about the local charities they support, the performances that dance and drama students present at the local primary school, and particularly about the peer mentoring scheme in the school in which the older students help and support the younger ones. Students develop exceptional skills in team work, competitiveness and risk taking through the impact of the business and enterprise specialism, which prepare them thoroughly for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They plan lessons well, setting out clear objectives which are understood by students and help to motivate them. Most lessons are well paced and include a variety of activities. These include group and pair work, competitions, and 'hands-on' activities, as well as opportunities for independent thought and reflection, which add to students' enjoyment and help ensure that students make good progress. However, a few lessons are too directed by teachers, and teachers' questions are insufficiently challenging.

Relationships are particularly good, and students speak in glowing terms of the extra help and support which teachers are prepared to provide both in and out of lessons. Teachers use assessment information very effectively to tailor work to the specific needs of students and ensure that they are challenged appropriately, particularly those at risk of under-achievement. Marking and frequent feedback mean that students have a clear idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The school's monitoring of teaching and learning is exemplary; teachers are constantly striving to improve and are very well supported as they do so. Teaching assistants are deployed well to help ensure that all students make good progress. Parents appreciate the opportunities to be involved in their children's development at school.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum to meet the needs of most of its students. Partnerships with local schools have increased the breadth of subjects that the school is able to offer to a small number of students. In Years 10 and 11, a good range of academic subjects are offered but the school recognises that there are few opportunities to study vocational courses. Provision for more-able students is very good and continues to improve. Additional subjects such as statistics are offered, and the school has recently gained the prestigious NACE (National Association for Able Children in Education) Challenge Award. Lower-attaining students are able to follow a programme to develop their personal skills, and provision for literacy, numeracy and information technology are good.

There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are well supported by the students. Students enjoy a variety of sporting, artistic and spiritual activities, as well as additional academic support when required. Activity weeks, and trips, nationally and abroad, contribute well to their overall enjoyment and personal development. Through the school's specialism the culture of

enterprise permeates through the curriculum and has a positive effect on the development of their skills for work.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Many parents comment on the 'care, dedication and hard work of the staff' in 'supporting and motivating students to not only achieve well, but to improve their confidence and self-belief'. Teachers know their students well and take a keen interest in ensuring that they enjoy their education and achieve to their full potential. Arrangements for safeguarding children meet statutory requirements, and the school has clear policies for promoting health and safety, equality and students' economic well-being. These are implemented well and reviewed regularly. Excellent links with local employers, underpinned by the schools specialism, prepare students well for their future careers. Strong links with local primary schools, and particularly effective induction procedures, enable new students to settle in quickly.

Detailed assessment information enables the school to track students' progress closely and to set appropriately challenging targets as they move through the school. The school identifies early any students at risk of academic or social difficulties and provides exceptionally good support for them. The Speech and Language Resource provides particularly effective support to students with language needs. Students are very well informed about their progress and are given high quality information about options and career paths to ensure that they are very well prepared for the next phase of education or employment.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Leadership and management in the main school are outstanding, and good in the sixth form. Progress in addressing the issues identified for improvement in the previous inspection has been good. The school's specialism has had good impact on the improvement of resources, particularly those for information and communication technology (ICT) and music.

The vision and leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He has established a clear direction for the school and is committed to improving the achievement of students. The senior leadership team, supported well by a strong team of middle managers, is clearly bringing about good improvements in many areas including the use of assessment for learning. It works very effectively in planning and implementing new developments, such as in the enterprise culture of the school. The monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous and used effectively to provide appropriate staff development. The use of assessment data to raise achievement and standards, particularly for higher-attaining students, has improved and is now used well to identify underachievement and provide appropriate strategies for support. Strategic planning is well focused on improving standards within its resources.

Governance is good. The governing body is well informed and is well placed to drive development and challenge performance. Statutory requirements are met. Day-to-day financial planning and monitoring are excellent and the capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

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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	1	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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	2	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
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	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

29 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Holmer Green Senior School, High Wycombe, HP15 6SP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff, and visiting lessons. Many of you and your parents told us how the caring and supportive environment, and your good relationships with teachers, meant that you enjoy school and feel safe there. We judged your school to be a very caring school that is providing you with a good education. We were particularly impressed by:

- your attitude to learning and the way in which your confidence and self-esteem develops as you move through the school
- the way the school cares for, and supports you in your learning, and when you have other problems or concerns
- the way the school is led by senior staff, and the commitment of its staff in your well-being
- the enrichment activities that the school provides to ensure that you have the best opportunities to make good progress in your academic and personal development.

To make your school even better we have recommended that it:

- helps you to gain good grades tests and exams, particularly at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form
- ensure that the curriculum fully meets the needs and aspirations of all students.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you behave well and work hard in lessons, and help the school put these plans in place, then standards will rise. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Nigel Fletcher

Her Majesty's Inspector