

Hele's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113536
Local Authority	Plymouth
Inspection number	311309
Inspection date	22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Mary Massey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1356
6th form	292
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karl Atkinson
Headteacher	Andrew Birkett
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Seymour Road Plympton Plymouth PL7 4LT
Telephone number	01752 337193
Fax number	01752 331460

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning, care, guidance and support, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, provision for teaching citizenship and leadership and management. Other aspects of the school's work, particularly in the sixth form, were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessment, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Hele's School is a popular, larger than average school serving Plympton and the eastern side of Plymouth. The majority of students are of White British origin and very few have English as an additional language. Very few students are eligible for free school meals. The number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low.

The school has held specialist language status for a number of years and also became a mathematics and computing college in 2004. It was invited to take on a third specialism, in vocational education, in 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Hele's is an outstanding school. One parent wrote, reflecting the views of many, 'We could not imagine a better school for our child'. Another said that the school, 'genuinely treats children and their parents as individuals, listens to their needs as well as observes them, and reacts appropriately with great skill and professionalism'. The senior management team, teaching and associate staff work together as a very effective team to provide a cooperative, calm and happy atmosphere where the quality of the care provided for every student is as important as the quality of their learning. The very successful integrated approach that the school makes towards developing the social and emotional aspects of learning has been widely recognised both nationally and locally, and ensures outstanding care, guidance and support for students. Consequently, they enjoy their experience of school very much. They are enthusiastic about learning and have an exceptionally high level of attendance.

One parent wrote that staff, 'appear to mix discipline with kindness, respect and a sense of humour to great effect'. Supportive relationships at all levels - between students of different ages and between staff and students - mean that everyone works well together. Students are articulate and self-confident, with particularly strong language and literacy skills. They feel that they contribute to the way the school is run and, even when commenting on what they see as less favourable aspects, criticise constructively. Older students mentor younger ones and some work with pupils in local primary schools. Enthusiastic participation in fundraising and involvement in other projects, for example to support refugees, show that students have concern for others outside the school community.

Social and moral education are outstanding and the school succeeds very well in its efforts to teach spiritual and multicultural awareness through personal, health and social education as well as religious studies. Students rightly feel very safe and secure and know there is someone to turn to if they are having problems. They are confident that the very few cases of bullying will be dealt with effectively. Behaviour in lessons is generally excellent, especially when teaching is exciting, and students behave well round the school. Students have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and support the recent changes made to provide more healthy food and also to make water available in lessons. They join in enthusiastically with sporting activities both in and out of lesson time, for example in the well attended 'Wake and Shake club' for Year 7, led by Year 11 students.

The school works hard to ensure that it meets the needs of all students and has strong links with outside agencies to provide extra professional expertise. Gifted and talented students are catered for well through special events such as challenge days set by subject departments. Provision for pupils who find aspects of mainstream education challenging is wide ranging and of high quality. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are carefully identified and very well supported so they make good progress. Teaching assistants make a positive contribution and are actively engaged in supporting learning both in classrooms and in the student support base. The school reaches out beyond students to groups of parents who may need extra support.

An outstanding curriculum, providing a wide range of opportunities both within and outside lessons, is enhanced by the school's specialist status, particularly in languages, vocational subjects, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). For example, one group of students each year has a quarter of their timetable taught in French. Skilful linking

of languages with vocational subjects, for example in work with a local ice-cream company marketing in France, helps to maintain enthusiasm for languages through to GCSE. A flexible curriculum at Key Stage 4 ensures that there is an appropriate course for everyone so that by the end of Year 11, students have qualifications that will take them on to further schooling, training or employment. Students report that they are given very good guidance, for example when choosing KS4 courses or deciding what to do after GCSEs.

Many parents commented on the very smooth transition from primary school. Students have good attainment on entry and make good progress in Years 7, 8 and 9. Progress accelerates in Years 10 and 11 and students achieve GCSE results that are well above the national average, but attainment is not as high in mathematics as in other subjects. Individual students' progress is monitored very carefully, and staff are trained to use data effectively to improve achievement. Students' strong progress is a result of good teaching and learning, with some outstanding lessons which are both inspirational and stimulating. One parent wrote that her son had developed an interest in some subjects as 'the result of enthusiastic teaching'. Effective planning ensures that all students can succeed, with care taken to match activities to each student's learning style and ability. Links with literacy, citizenship and thinking skills are integrated well into lessons, and students are at ease working with a partner or as part of a team. Students regularly evaluate their own progress and, through this, are aware of what they need to do in order to improve. They take responsibility for their learning and can work independently. On a few occasions, however, teachers talk for too long and students are not actively involved enough with their learning, especially in mathematics. Although teachers talk to students regularly about their work, so they know how well they are doing and what they need to do in order to improve, feedback through marking misses opportunities to move learning on more rapidly.

Since the last inspection, the school has substantially improved accommodation and resources in English and design and technology, and made some more limited changes in visual and performing arts. Achievement in these subjects has improved. The headteacher is working to improve poor quality accommodation in mathematics. Some classrooms are damp and all are over-crowded, restricting activities, particularly opportunities for practical investigations in groups. As a result, the standards students attain are also restricted.

The headteacher, governors and an enthusiastic and effective senior leadership team set an exceptionally clear direction for the school, with a strong focus on raising standards. Middle leaders such as heads of department, as well as senior leaders, know the school well, and systems for monitoring and tracking students are exemplary. Thorough analysis of data contributes to detailed self-evaluation in departments as well as at whole-school level. All staff are involved in identifying areas of weakness and implementing well-targeted plans to improve. Challenging targets are set at all levels, for leaders, teachers and students. Training needs are met through carefully coordinated professional development activities. For example, teachers are keen to learn ways to make their lessons more effective and interesting for students, so the best practice in the school is shared regularly, both within and between departments. Governors are supportive and regularly involved in the life of the school. The result of much very effective action by the school over the last year has been an increase in the rate at which students are making progress. The school has outstanding capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

About 75% of Hele's students stay on into the sixth form, with students of a wide range of abilities and aptitudes taking advantage of an exceptional curriculum. As in the main school, the school's specialisms permeate the curriculum. The range of courses is further enhanced by the school's membership of the Plym and Tamar Valley Consortia which allow schools to work together to provide increased sixth form opportunities. In spite of some difficulties with centralised timetabling, these arrangements provide a varied curriculum with high quality teaching and learning that allows students to make exceptional progress and achieve standards that are well above the national average. Accommodation for some subjects, particularly the performing and visual arts, is limited. Students feel very positive about their experience in the sixth form and say that teachers really want them to achieve well. Their progress is tracked carefully and they are given regular, constructive feedback to help them improve. Students are effective independent learners and teachers willingly give extra time to support them. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding, with particular strengths in the monitoring of students' academic progress, strong personal support and in the good advice on choosing courses and preparing for university.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teachers consistently deliver exciting and stimulating lessons that allow students to be actively involved in their learning, particularly in mathematics.

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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	1
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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	2	
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	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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
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	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	1
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	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	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

Dear Students

Inspection of Hele's School, Plympton PL7 4LT

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we came to inspect your school recently. We found you very honest and keen to tell us all about the good things at Hele's but also very ready to make constructive criticism where you felt it was necessary. I would like to tell you about our findings and encourage you to read the full report on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Hele's is an outstanding school. The leadership team and all the staff work very effectively not only to make your school a place where you are exceptionally well cared for, but also one where you can make good progress and achieve high standards. We were very impressed by how you take responsibility for your own learning, the enthusiastic way in which you join in lessons and contribute to the school community. Your very high rates of attendance show that you enjoy school. You told us that the school is a happy place to learn where you feel safe and confident.

The school's three specialisms in languages, mathematics and computing and vocational education make a positive difference to the curriculum, so you have an outstanding range of activities both in and out of lessons. You told us that you thought teaching and learning were good, with some that is outstanding, and we agreed. We have asked the school to make sure that all lessons are exciting and stimulating and allow you to be actively involved, especially in mathematics where your progress and achievement are not as good as they are in other subjects. Teachers track your progress very carefully so that you know how well you are doing and what you have to do to improve. You also said that the regular opportunities you are given to assess your own work help you to progress. Your headteacher and all the teaching and associate staff do a brilliant job in making sure that every one of you can leave school with qualifications that will allow you to be successful and achieve your ambitions. They also make sure that you develop into confident and thoughtful young people who have a real contribution to make to the community.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Mary Massey HMI



23 November 2007

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