

The Hermitage School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114290
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	311552
Inspection date	11 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Mary Sewell

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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	825
6th form	185
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Brian Ebbatson
Headteacher	Mr Ian Robertson
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2004
School address	Waldridge Lane Chester le Street County Durham DH2 3AD
Telephone number	0191 3887161
Fax number	0191 3871137

Age group	11-18
Inspection date	11 October 2007
Inspection number	311552

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Hermitage School is an average sized comprehensive school with a rapidly developing sixth form of almost 200 students. It holds Technology College Status. The number of students eligible for a free school meal is below the national average. The proportion of students from ethnic minority groups is lower than the national average. The number of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average with those who have a statement of special educational need lower than average. At the time of the inspection the headteacher was seconded for three days a week to work with the local authority. The school was managed by the deputy headteacher.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: current achievement especially in English and the quality of the provision and the effectiveness of leaders and managers. Evidence was gathered from discussions with the headteacher and students, observations of teaching and learning, checking students' work and school documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found evidence to suggest that the school's own assessment, as given in its self-evaluation, were modest and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school with an excellent view of its own effectiveness. It offers a superb range of opportunities for its students and provides excellent value for money. The rich curriculum is at the heart of this school's success. Students are valued as individuals. They have exceptional support and guidance when choosing a personalised learning programme. As a result, students are sharply focused and achieve well. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and feel that school gives their children 'a good sense of community and pride' and is 'constantly striving to improve in all areas'. They recognise that superb teaching and excellent management underpin their children's success.

Students' attainment on entry is broadly average and they make good progress between Years 7 and 9. However this is not clearly reflected in the government's statistical data because students are entered a year early, in Year 8, for the national tests in English and Science. In 2006, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 were average overall. Early indications are that results for 2007 are higher.

Standards by the end of Key Stage 4 are well above average. This is because students are able to study what interests and motivates them. Some students are entered early for examinations; others take up additional subjects such as ethics and philosophy, religious life and society or begin their advanced level courses. All targets, including those for its specialist school status, are met. Early indications from the 2007 results suggest that, for the fourth year running, students have made outstanding progress.

Students in The Hermitage want to succeed and do well. They know how to stay healthy and are keen to take up responsibility, as in the school council. By the time they reach Year 11, they are confident, articulate and mature young people. Making sure students enjoy their learning, are safe and healthy and make a positive contribution to the community is given a very high priority. Students say all adults are approachable, their views are listened to and they feel safe and secure. It is clear that they enjoy school; 'It is fantastic!' They attend regularly and have positive attitudes to their work. Currently there is insufficient development of multicultural awareness to ensure students are fully informed about other cultures and societies.

Achievement is outstanding because teaching is excellent. Teachers know their students well and learning is maximised because there is an excellent match of task to students' needs. Rigorous, vibrant, and challenging lessons where expectations are high secures learning by inspiring and motivating students. Students clearly understand what is to be learned and how this will be achieved because marking is highly effective and informs their learning targets. They appreciate and welcome the opportunity to take some responsibility for their own learning, for example, by assessing their own progress. This increased self-motivation has improved attendance and greatly reduced incidents of inappropriate behaviour in lessons. Relationships are excellent, teachers and students work in tandem to produce high quality work.

A rich, flexible curriculum enables all students to tailor a programme which suits their individual learning needs. This, combined with excellent academic and pastoral guidance, is the key to the school's success. Students say they have excellent advice because they have their assessments regularly appraised via an effective tracking system. The catalyst for the successful curriculum delivery is the schools attention to detail and its focus on the needs of individual students.

Good guidance for work related learning, including work experience, ensures students are well prepared for adult life. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and some students benefit from professional mentors. Students were keen to talk about the wide range of extra opportunities the school offered at the end of the day.

The impact of the school's specialist status has been the exceptional breadth of subjects on offer at Key Stage 4 and the rapid development of technology including excellent information and communication technology. As a result, nearly two thirds of all students now obtain more than nine subjects by the end of Year 11 at A* to C.

It is because of the dedicated and inspirational leadership of both the seconded and acting headteacher that no stone has been left unturned when it comes to raising achievement. Their close working relationship has added greatly to the development of teaching and learning, the curriculum and the raising of achievement. Both clearly focus on empowering all in the school, whether they are staff or students, to perform at their best. It is this incisive direction for improvement which cuts to the heart of school development. Their clear vision for students' preparation for adult life is successfully implemented because the systems for checking progress are well embedded. The excellent process of subject leaders regularly observing teaching and learning has led to department and school development plans being continually updated electronically. This has ensured a thorough and ongoing process of self-evaluation. This, combined with the excellent student tracking system, has resulted in the leaders and managers having both a holistic overview and an intimate knowledge of individual student progress.

Governors know the school well, are active participants in school development and provide excellent support for the leadership. The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection. Its capacity for improvement as it moves forward into Trust Status is excellent.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students enjoy their sixth form experience. They achieve well from variable starting points because they have a good understanding of what is expected of them and how this will be achieved. Teaching is good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and the leap in learning between the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and an advanced level course is managed successfully. This is because teaching is well structured and individual student needs are well met. Students are gaining more responsibility for their learning but there is still a need to increase independent thinking. Students appreciate the many opportunities to gain experience and understanding beyond Hermitage School and speak positively about the increasing opportunities to study with sixth formers from neighbouring schools. They feel well supported in their applications for higher education and are well prepared for their roles as adults. The sixth form is well led and managed and systems for monitoring and self-review are in place.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of multi-cultural education so that students learn more effectively about life in other cultures and societies.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	----------------	-------

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	2	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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
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	2	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Hermitage School, Durham, DH2 3AD

Thank you all for helping us when we came to visit your school last week. We were impressed by how mature and confident you were, especially those of you who took some time to come and talk to us.

We judged your school to be outstanding because you all make exceptional progress from starting school to finishing your GCSE courses. This is because you are taught so well and have interesting and exciting lessons. You also make exceptional progress because you are helped to choose very carefully from a wide range of interesting subjects. You explained to us that you could choose some academic subjects but also some work-related courses and you thought this would help you find a suitable career later. You said you understood how well you are doing in school because you are regularly informed. Many of you were able to tell us what you needed to do to improve your work because you were familiar with the way in which your work was marked.

We were pleased to hear that you know how to stay healthy and safe and that you feel all adults are willing to listen to you if you have a problem.

We were very impressed by how well you got along with each other and your teachers. You told us you enjoy attending school regularly and have positive attitudes to your work. You said school was 'fantastic' and you loved the extra opportunities, especially the sport after school.

Your school is very well led and, because you are all known very well, there are excellent ideas for helping you to gain as many examination passes as possible. The school is well supported by the governors who also want you to do well.

We have asked one thing of the school. That is that you have more experience of the way people live in other cultures and societies.

On behalf of Mr Petts and myself we wish you all the very best for your future.

Yours sincerely

Mary Sewell

Lead Inspector