

Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118880
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313131
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Patricia Metham HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	2117
6th form	299
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Principal	William Cotterell
Date of previous school inspection	17 February 2003
School address	Ashford Road Tenterden TN30 6LT
Telephone number	01580 764222
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre is a large, mixed, foundation comprehensive school with a substantial sixth form, in a local authority also providing selective education. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is much lower than the national average and almost all students have English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The school achieved Arts College status (Performing Arts) in 2001 and was re-designated in 2007, when it also gained Vocational Specialist Status. Homewood is an Advanced Extended School and was a pilot for the 2005 national initiative. In 2007 it achieved the Quality in Extended Schools Advanced Award for its community and extended links. In 2005 the school gained the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the Artsmark Gold Award. In 2006 it achieved Reading Connects Status and the Suzy Lamplugh Safe Schools Award. In 2007 it was awarded Healthy School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, outstanding in many respects. Amongst its key strengths are the transparency and coherence of its leadership and management, carefully monitored and supported by the governing body. The vigorously articulated confidence of Homewood's new principal, who was previously senior deputy, infuses the whole school with a shared vision and buoyancy. Areas of responsibility are well defined, with opportunities for staff at all levels and from all areas of the organisation to make a positive contribution. The principal and his strategic committee ensure there is a secure balance between day-to-day organisation and long-term planning. The development of 'mini-schools', a blend of 'faculty' and 'house' that successfully weaves together curriculum and pastoral strands, has ensured that despite Homewood's size students feel they are known, valued and well directed. Although recent innovation in the school's organisation and curriculum has yet to impact comprehensively on achievement and standards, with mathematics continuing to lag behind other subjects, it has brought greater stability of staffing and increased enrolment. It has also established Homewood as a widely respected centre for performing arts and vocational education and as an effective Leading Edge partner helping to raise standards in other schools.

While high attaining students do enter Homewood's Year 7, a significant proportion of more able children go to nearby selective and private schools. Standards reached by the end of Year 11 and Year 13 are broadly in line with national averages, which represents good progress for most students. Recent results in national tests conventionally taken at the end of Year 9 were below the national average; a contributory factor was the school's decision to enter students a year early. Supported by the governors, the school's senior leadership has judged it in students' long-term interests to maintain a brisk pace in Years 7 and 8 and then either complete a GCSE programme by the end of Year 10 before embarking upon sixth form studies in Year 11 or benefit from an additional year to consolidate and extend GCSE work. Those parents who have expressed doubts about the wisdom of this strategy feel there should have been greater consultation before such significant change. While this indicates a need for improved communication with parents, there is, however, a high level of satisfaction amongst parents, vividly conveyed in the comment: 'The previous headteacher said, "Education is lighting a fire within a child." I feel Homewood School has lit a furnace in my daughter!'

The students themselves respond positively to the flexibility and breadth of choice offered, confident that they will be able to achieve their potential through following courses that suit their individual needs and abilities. Teaching and learning are good overall, often imaginative, active and well paced, with a confident and creative use of information and communication technology. There is some unevenness in the quality of marking and feedback and in the use of assessment to match teaching to students' needs, which senior leaders are tackling.

Homewood's positive ethos is evident in students' care for each other and their readiness to take on responsibility. Although improving attendance rates are still only satisfactory, most students enjoy school and feel safe. They understand the need to develop healthy lifestyles and keep fit, although not all take advantage of the school canteen's healthy meals. Sixth formers act as mentors for younger students and develop organisational and leadership skills that will stand them in good stead later. While numeracy is a relatively weak element, work-related learning, a sound grounding in information and communication technology and the development of lively communication skills prepare students well for future training and employment.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good, with outstanding features. It is well led and managed, with recent appointments strengthening the monitoring of progress and attendance. Homewood enters students for external examinations early, using a 'stage rather than age' approach, so those in Year 11 who have completed their GCSE programme work with Year 12 students on Advanced Supplementary (AS) courses. Progress is good overall given the entry levels of a significant proportion of those embarking on sixth form courses. Advanced Level (AL) results in Year 13 are close to the national average, better than for AS subjects taken by Years 11 and 12; students mature as they move through the sixth form. Teaching and learning are generally good, although students do not always have opportunities to work independently and there are inconsistencies between departments in the quality and frequency of feedback.

The outstanding curriculum provides an extensive choice of vocational and AL programmes and access to Open University foundation courses. Staying-on rates into Year 13 are good. Links with other organisations provide additional opportunities to develop awareness of issues related to adult life. For example, a pre-driving drama, 'Too much Punch for Judy', performed by a visiting theatre company, highlighted the dangers of drinking and driving. Guidance and induction procedures are thorough. A comprehensive tutorial programme includes sessions to develop students' economic awareness. Sixth formers make an outstanding contribution to the whole school, developing leadership skills through mentoring, leading the school council and organising activities such as the showcase for Year 7 and 8 performances in the Sinden Theatre.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement in mathematics and numeracy.
- Ensure consistency of good practice in marking and feedback and in the use of assessment to match teaching to students' individual needs.
- Improve communication with parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement and progress are good across the school. Standards are broadly average. Local selective education means that relatively few high-attaining children enter Year 7. Recent results in national tests generally taken at the end of Year 9 are below average, reflecting Homewood's decision to enter students a year early to maintain momentum in Year 8 and release more time for GCSE programmes. A few parents find this strategy unsettling and are unclear about its rationale, but most students share the school's conviction that Year 9 national tests are of less long-term value than enhanced opportunities for GCSE study.

Standards achieved in GCSE examinations are average and improving, with pupils making good progress in most subjects between Years 7 and 11. Success in vocational courses has strengthened overall attainment. Equality of opportunity is real. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve as well as their contemporaries in relation to their starting points and capabilities. Progress and attainment in mathematics, however, have been inadequate for the past three years. Action to resolve staffing issues and to develop a more engaging and well-managed mathematics curriculum is now having a positive impact. The current Year 11

results show improvement and inspection evidence indicates that progress is now generally satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's ethos of mutual respect makes a difference; parents have commented on their children's improvement. Most students enjoy school and attendance rates, while still only satisfactory, are improving in response to the school's insistent and targeted action. Students participate enthusiastically in the many activities offered, especially the 'unique enrichment' timetabled into the curriculum, such as creative writing, DJ technology and Sudoku. They feel safe, treat each other sensibly and are confident in seeking guidance where needed. Any instances of bullying are swiftly resolved. Students are well informed about health and welfare issues. Behaviour is generally good; however, a few students find it difficult to manage their own behaviour in lessons, which limits their own and sometimes others' progress. Students' contribution to the school community and beyond is outstanding. They develop leadership skills, for example, through sports and the performing arts; many gain a leadership qualification. They raise money for local, regional and international charities, developing skills that prepare them well for later life. The active and well-respected student council contributes much to the school's efficient running. The school's determinedly inclusive approach ensures that students of all abilities and interests are confident in their long-term prospects and feel that they are being well prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall and sometimes outstanding. Managers monitor the quality of teaching carefully, linking it to students' progress. Efficient analysis of data identifies areas for development and highlights successful strategies; this then shapes lesson planning and teaching methods. Professional development for staff has high priority; however, good practice is not yet consistently established, for example, in the use of assessment to match teaching to pupils' needs and marking.

Teachers' subject knowledge is secure, complemented by a good understanding of how students learn best. In Years 7 and 8, there is a productive emphasis on developing study skills for all abilities. An interdisciplinary and topic-based approach promotes active learning and allows a co-ordinated response when an aspect, such as reading, needs strengthening. It is effective for all students and especially so for the Key Skills group in Years 7 and 8. The imaginative methods used in Years 7 to 9 to foster creativity and independence are being adapted and extended to Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, where improved achievement and rising standards are becoming evident. Interesting resources and tasks capture students' attention, and teachers give constructive support to anyone needing extra help to meet their targets. Staff and students use computers and information and communication technology confidently to demonstrate concepts, to support independent study and to monitor progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is innovative and outstanding, designed to personalise learning and promote achievement in its widest sense. The accelerated curriculum for Years 7 and 8 covers in two years the ground conventionally covered in three; its inter-disciplinary, topic-based approach develops students' key skills and confidence. In Years 9–11 and the sixth form an outstanding range of courses meets individual needs and aspirations. Vocational opportunities, in partnership with local providers, lead to nationally recognised awards and serve many students well. The school is using its newly acquired vocational specialist status to extend provision and improve resources. Having completed their GCSE programme in Year 10, a number of students progress to AS study or further vocational courses in Year 11. Teaching groups are not age related but match students' capabilities and interests, which ensures readiness to sit appropriate examinations and extends choice.

The impact of Homewood's specialist Arts College status is clear in the range and quality of its performing arts courses. Students extend their own learning as they contribute to arts education in local primary and secondary schools. The numerous after-school activities are popular, including sports and performing arts, a Young Farmers' Club based on the school farm and Extended School activities in the evenings and weekends. Students benefit from a weekly enrichment lesson, with an extensive choice of activity to broaden their experience and raise achievement. Work experience and enterprise activities help prepare them for future employment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Child protection systems and health and safety procedures are secure and robust. The 'mini school' structure provides a vertical pastoral system that contributes significantly to students' social and emotional development and, according to students, prevents bullying. Students value their tutors' care and support; 'Your tutor's not just a teacher – a friend!' Welfare and academic progress are carefully monitored but the quality of day-by-day academic guidance is variable; marking of work does not always indicate the specific steps needed to make progress. Careers and options advice is good; most students understand their personal targets so choices are generally realistic. The family support co-ordinator plays an important role, particularly in supporting vulnerable students and those at risk of exclusion. The learning support department contributes significantly to the progress and achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, making excellent use of external agencies whenever appropriate. The school celebrates achievement of any kind, which students appreciate: 'If you do well, you get shown you do well.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The governors' decision to encourage expansion has allowed an approach to curriculum development and teaching that supports personalised learning. Commitment to equality of opportunity and inclusion is widely shared and thoroughly implemented. The school is restructuring its associate staffing to create a new senior finance officer post. There are currently financial constraints; nonetheless, there has been substantial and generally effective investment in teaching and learning. Capacity to improve is good. It is clear that leadership and management act decisively when they identify an area of weakness or recognise a positive opportunity, although some issues, such as achievement and standards in mathematics, are taking time to resolve.

Teaching and associate staff have opportunities to develop leadership and management skills at departmental and mini-school level, with close guidance and support. Senior leaders' active involvement in mini-school life enables them to monitor performance and ensure that their strategic planning is well rooted in first-hand knowledge of the school. Not all parents, however, feel that home-school communication is sufficiently prompt or comprehensive. Challenging targets are set for departments, individual staff and students, based on well-organised and widely accessible data. Not all are yet being met but they give impetus to the school's emphasis on high expectations as a first step to high achievement.

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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	3	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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	2	

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	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?	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	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	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

10 November, 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Homewood School and Sixth Form Centre, Tenterden, Kent TN30 6LT

Thank you for the cheerful friendliness with which you made our team welcome when we visited your school recently. The pride you take in your achievements and your loyalty to Homewood support our judgement that yours is a good and still improving school with a good sixth form.

I am glad to have this opportunity to explain briefly what we could see working particularly well and what could make Homewood School even better. There have been significant and generally successful changes to the organisation of the school, to its curriculum and to the ways in which you learn. The TOTAl curriculum in Years 7 and 8 helps you develop important skills and self-confidence. You made it clear that you value opportunities to take some examinations earlier than is usual and have time to explore new subjects.

Yours is a genuinely inclusive school where everyone has opportunities to do well in ways that match individual strengths and ambitions. The 'mini-schools' and vertical tutor groups mean that, even in this large school, you feel secure and valued. You benefit from an outstanding range of courses and enrichment activities, including rewarding opportunities linked to Homewood's specialist vocational and performing arts status. There are good systems in place to ensure that you are well cared for and healthy and given sound advice about your progress and your choices for the future. You are well taught by teachers who are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects, so your progress is good.

So that you do as well as you possibly can, we have asked the school to ensure that: ? standards and achievement in mathematics improve; ? the way in which your work is marked always makes it clear how you can do better and teachers always use their assessment of what you can do and how you learn when they are planning lessons; ? your parents are given the information they need clearly and in good time.

You can help by making sure that, unless it is unavoidable, you do not miss any days of school.

I wish you and Homewood School continuing success.

Patricia Metham HMI

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Patricia Metham
HMI