

Herne Bay High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118920
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313150
Inspection date	15 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1524
6th form	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Eames
Headteacher	Danny ODonovan
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	Bullockstone Road Herne Bay CT6 7NS
Telephone number	01227 361221
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

the impact of the school's provision in improving standards and students' achievement further, especially in reducing subject differences at GCSE and in the sixth form

the effectiveness of systems to track and assess students' progress, set and revise challenging targets and influence teachers' planning

the effectiveness of middle leaders in influencing and improving the work in their areas of responsibility, and how they are held accountable for what they do.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, scrutiny of students' work and teachers' planning, discussions with students, staff and the chair of governors, the views of parents and a scrutiny of the school's documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Herne Bay High School is a large school that has grown considerably over the last ten years, more than doubling in size. Because of the selective system within the local authority, the school has far fewer higher attaining students and many more lower attaining students than the average comprehensive school. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. Most students are of White British origin and the remainder come from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has a much larger number of children looked after by the local authority than most schools. The school gained specialist sports college status in 2002, which was re-designated in 2007 with mathematics as a nominated target-setting subject. The executive headteacher is currently on secondment to the local authority and, although still closely involved with the school, the day-to-day leadership of the school is undertaken by the acting headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Herne Bay High School is an outstanding school in which students of all abilities thrive and do well, especially in their personal development, which is excellent. The school's distinctive ethos, in which its specialist status for sport is a powerful catalyst, is helping students to mature into confident young people who are very well prepared for their future lives. For more than half of the students in Year 13 last year, this was into higher education. Students take great pride in being a member of the school community and value greatly the support they receive from staff. Most parents think highly of the school and what it does for their children. One parent, reflecting the views of many, commented: 'My child is making excellent progress and I could not wish for him to go to a better school.'

There are many reasons for the school's success. One of the most important factors is the outstanding leadership of the executive headteacher, supported by the very able acting headteacher. Their energy, vision and drive have ensured that the school has grown and developed substantially over the past few years so that students have the best possible opportunities to do well and gain success. A specific focus on developing the leadership skills of staff and students alike, together with a strong commitment to teamwork, ensures that the school has excellent capacity to grow and develop further. A strong culture of innovation prevails, seen in the changes that have been implemented to support students more effectively within 'mini-communities' in this large school, the development of 'schools of learning' and the wide-ranging impact of its sports college status. Many of these innovations are closely tied in with the school's involvement in the 'Building Schools for the Future' initiative and are already bringing substantial benefits to the students themselves.

Students' attainment on entry to the school, as seen in their overall performance in the national tests in Year 6, is below average, but they do less well in English and mathematics than in science. They start school with weaknesses in their literacy and numeracy skills, as confirmed by their performance in the standardised tests taken in Year 7. Students make good progress and achieve well in the main school and in the sixth form. The picture, though, across the various subjects in GCSE and AS-/A-level examinations has been inconsistent, with students doing particularly well in some subjects, and not as strongly in others. The school is involved in a project to reduce the disparity in performance between subjects but this work is in its early stages.

Over the past few years, standards have risen substantially to the point that the school's GCSE results in 2007 were broadly average. The school exceeded the challenging targets it had set itself. The school's data show that the results are set to be similar this year, but with an increase in the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Students make much faster progress than expected during Years 7 to 9, especially in English and mathematics. In the national tests in Year 9 in 2007, the results at the expected Level 5 were well above average in English, broadly average in mathematics, but below average in science. In all three subjects, the school exceeded its challenging targets, doing so particularly well in English. A whole-school literacy strategy has led to improvements in the students' results in the Year 9 tests and in GCSE examinations. Difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers in some subjects, especially in English, mathematics and science, has resulted in the school's 'grow your own' programme to enhance the skills of staff, and the development of a 'coaching' model to share expertise and good practice. These are working very well.

The school accurately judges that teaching in all years is good, with some that is outstanding. Lessons are well organised and calm, with the learning objectives carefully shared with the students at the beginning of the lesson. Teachers are confident in their knowledge of examination requirements and most are good at relating work to assessment criteria or to its position within the topic. Relationships are extremely positive and teachers successfully engage students actively in lessons and ask well-considered questions. Teachers track students' progress over time regularly but do not always check their progress during lessons or help students develop the skills of assessing their own work and that of others. Students are clear about their targets and what they need to do to reach them, but marking does not consistently help them to improve their work. This is being addressed by the school.

The school is extremely successful at promoting students' personal development. Excellent relationships between staff and students and students themselves create a calm atmosphere for effective learning. A strong sense of community pervades the school. Students are enthusiastic about what the school offers them, and their attitudes to learning are extremely positive. Their moral and social development is particularly strong. The vast majority behaves very well in response to the school's high expectations and this is reflected in the low levels of fixed-term exclusions. Students have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe, and move around the school with consideration for others. Members of the school forum speak proudly of the module of work they devised recently for raising anti-bullying issues in the mentor workshops, especially as it involved training staff to implement it. In addition, the 'school message', which is displayed and reinforced throughout the school, emphasises the importance of 'respect for others'. A few parents raised some concerns about bullying in the school, but there was no evidence of this during the inspection. Students say that staff are 'really good' at dealing with any incidents of bullying.

Ensuring that students adopt healthy lifestyles and eat healthily are important elements of the school's sports college status. Mini-community activity coordinators and sports leaders organise physical activities during mentor time in the morning and large numbers of students participate in the very wide range of extra-curricular activities. They eat healthily at lunchtimes. The Healthy Schools award and Activemark Gold are testimony to the school's undoubted strengths in this area and are underpinned by the highly focused personal, social and health education and citizenship programme. Students are very active in contributing to their school community as well as to the wider community through membership of the mini-community councils and the school forum. In mentor time, older students support younger students in activities such as paired reading. Student sports leaders, who are an important element of the school's strategy to develop students' leadership skills, run activities during the week, as well as working with local primary schools on a variety of sporting activities. Students organise fund raising events during the year, with each mini-community supporting a charity in a different continent.

The curriculum meets students' needs and aspirations extremely well. All study a vocational subject in Years 10 and 11 and participate in a wide range of opportunities to engage with the outside world, including, for example, business enterprise activities, work experience and work-related learning, as well as a vocational partnership with two local schools for selected students. These opportunities prepare students extremely well for their future lives. The school's specialist sports status, with its focus on helping students gain additional sporting and coaching qualifications, generates close links with the community. A wide range of visits and visitors, as well as the extensive variety of extra-curricular clubs, workshops and other activities, also enriches students' experiences.

Support staff, including a host of external agencies, provide excellent care and guidance for students to ensure their well-being. Child protection and other safeguarding procedures are robust. Particular care is taken to ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, students looked after by the local authority, or those who may be vulnerable, receive effective support. Attendance remains broadly average because a few students do not come to school as regularly as they should. However, the school monitors attendance and behaviour carefully and the overall level of attendance does not reflect that of the very large proportion of students whose attendance is good.

From their programme of monitoring, senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's priorities. Raising standards further is a key area of focus, as is the regular checking of the quality of teaching and learning. Much of the school's highly inclusive ethos and the opportunities and achievements students enjoy are in large measure as a result of the inspirational leadership of the executive headteacher, with the support of his senior colleagues. Middle leaders are undertaking their responsibilities very well and are held closely to account for what they do. The governing body provides the school with excellent support and plays a very strong role in the school's development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students gain much from being in the sixth form and receive a good education. They have a wide choice of academic and vocational subjects, including key skills and general studies. Retention rates are high. Standards are slightly below average at the end of Year 13. The school's results in 2007 were not quite as good as they were in the previous year. Nevertheless, when account is taken of their earlier performance in GCSE examinations, students achieve well, although not consistently well in all subjects. They do particularly well in media studies and computing. The predominantly good teaching, together with effective support from their tutors, enables most students to make good progress in the sixth form. Some of the teaching, however, does not do enough to involve students actively enough in their learning. Students' attitudes to school and to learning are good and they make an effective contribution to the school community. The school ensures that the courses students follow are suited to their needs and aspirations and is developing more robust systems to support and guide students during their time in the sixth form. Students appreciate the support they receive, especially from the recently appointed pastoral support manager. Subject teachers monitor and assess the progress of students in their groups but there is no system to collate this information on a regular basis to provide the head of sixth form with an overview of their progress. The sixth form is led well. A recent review has widened the leadership group and they are settling into their roles well. They have a very good understanding of the areas requiring improvement and how this can be best achieved.

What the school should do to improve further

- Reduce the disparity in achievement between subjects in GCSE and AS-/A-level examinations.
- Implement a rigorous system to maintain an overview of students' progress in the sixth form.

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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?	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?	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?	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	3	
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	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	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	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

16 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Herne Bay High School, Herne Bay, CT6 7NS

Thank you for welcoming us to your school last week. We enjoyed our visit. Our discussions with members of the school forum helped us to gain a clearer picture of the work of the school. This letter is to give you a summary of our conclusions, but I hope that as many as possible of you will take the opportunity to read the full report.

The school gives you an outstanding education and helps to prepare you exceptionally well for your future lives. You achieve well, not only in your academic work but also in your personal development, which is outstanding. The good teaching enables you to make good progress and reach broadly average standards in GCSE examinations. Those of you in the sixth form also make good progress and attain standards that are close to the national average by Year 13. The curriculum, including the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities available, provides you with excellent opportunities to extend your skills and interests. The way the school's sports college status helps you to develop your leadership roles and to contribute to the school and wider community is particularly impressive.

Your attitudes to school are extremely positive, shown by your willingness to participate in all that the school provides and to undertake additional responsibilities in various ways. You take considerable pride in being at the school and those of you to whom we spoke found it difficult to identify anything that could be improved. You are friendly and polite, and relationships between you and with staff are very positive. You say you feel very safe and that staff are 'really good' at helping you if you have any problems. You also have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Staff take extremely good care of you and ensure that you receive the right kind of support to develop academically and as citizens of the future.

The school is led extremely well by the executive headteacher, the acting headteacher, senior and middle leaders and governors. They are committed to ensuring that the school continues to provide you with the best possible opportunities to be successful. We have asked the school to do two things to help it do even better and we hope that you will continue to do all you can to help it do so.

- Reduce the differences in achievement between subjects in GCSE and AS-/A-level examinations.
- Put in place a more rigorous system to keep an overview of students' progress in the sixth form.

Yours sincerely Mrs J Greenfield Lead inspector