

Highfield Humanities College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119732
Local Authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	313410
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Ruth James HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Lily Henderson MBE
Headteacher	Mr Ian Evans
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Highfield Road Blackpool Lancashire FY4 3JZ
Telephone number	01253 310925
Fax number	01253 310929

Age group	11-16
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2008
Inspection number	313410

© Crown copyright 2008

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Highfield Humanities College is of above average size and serves a community in the southern part of Blackpool. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage. Very few students have a first language other than English.

The proportion of students who receive free school meals is below average.

Although the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, there are more students with statements of special educational need than typically found. The school has a special unit for students with physical disabilities. The school achieved specialist status in humanities in September 2004. It also has Investors in People and Chartermark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Highfield School is a satisfactory school with some good features. There have been many improvements since the last inspection, most notably a very significant improvement in Key Stage 4 examination results. Students make satisfactory progress and leave the school with average standards of attainment. Results for humanities subjects and vocational courses are good.

Students' personal development is good. Although some parents have concerns about behaviour, inspectors found that students are well behaved in lessons and around school. Exclusions are reducing as a result of new behaviour management strategies. Students make a positive contribution to the local and school community. Attendance has improved and is now about average as a result of the efforts of the school.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Some lessons are good, and a few are outstanding. Teaching is better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3, and this is reflected in the better progress made in Key Stage 4. Information and communications technology (ICT) is now used well to enhance teaching and learning. The available data about students' progress is not yet used to full effect in planning lessons. Marking shows inconsistencies, both in terms of frequency of marking and in how much guidance is given to pupils about how to improve their work.

The curriculum is good. At Key Stage 4 a wide range of options, including GCSEs, vocational courses and college courses, ensures that the needs of students of different abilities, interests and aspirations are met. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities including trips, and visits overseas. At Key Stage 3 the curriculum is broad and balanced.

Care, guidance and support are good. Pastoral care is a particular strength, most notably for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and these students achieve well as a result of the support they are given. Students are aware of their targets. Systems for monitoring progress have improved and they are now used well at Key Stage 4 to plan interventions. These have contributed significantly to the improving results. Guidance on Year 9 and Post-16 options is good. Time spent in assemblies and with personal tutors is not always used effectively.

The achievement of specialist status in humanities has been used effectively to promote a number of initiatives to raise achievement, although opportunities to share the good practice that exists in teaching and learning in the specialist subjects of history, geography, and religious education are not fully exploited. Specialist status also makes a strong contribution to students' personal development and well-being, and to promoting the heritage of the local community through links with war veterans for example.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong and effective leadership and the senior team ably lead on a range of aspects. Middle managers are clearly held accountable for the quality of provision in their areas and results. The school development plan is firmly focused on raising achievement. Governors know the school well and provide support and a strategic overview. Partnership arrangements are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning, especially in Key Stage 3, so that more is good or better.
- Make better use of tracking data, especially at Key Stage 3, to inform lesson planning and accelerate student progress.

- Improve the consistency, quality and helpfulness of the marking of students work so that they understand what they need to do to improve.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Examination results have improved significantly in recent years. Students arrive in Year 7 with broadly satisfactory attainment and make satisfactory progress during their time at Highfield so that they reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the school.

Standards at Key Stage 3 are broadly average, but the proportion of students gaining the higher levels in English was low in 2007. Progress in English at Key Stage 3 has been below average but there are signs that it is improving. Progress in mathematics and science are satisfactory. In science, results show an improving trend and in 2007 the proportion of students gaining the higher levels in national tests was above average. The school did not meet all its targets at Key Stage 3 in 2007.

Results for vocational courses at Key Stage 4 are excellent, with 100% pass rates for all courses taken in 2007 including, construction, health and social care, leisure and tourism, and engineering. Results are now in line with national averages for key measures including 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C and 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics. Results in the humanities subjects of the school specialism are good, and these include a number of high grades for those selected to take GCSE religious education in Year 9. In 2007, all Year 11 students achieved at least one GCSE grade A*-G. The school met or exceeded its targets for key aspects of performance at Key Stage 4 in 2007.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well and make better progress than other students because of the very good level of support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Attendance has improved and is now average. The improvement is due to the school's work with students and their parents. The behaviour observed by inspectors in lessons and around school was good. Most students are polite and well mannered. In the majority lessons, most pupils behave sensibly; they are compliant and show high levels of respect to adults. However, a few students and parents commented on the behaviour of a minority of students. In a small number of lessons, students' learning is affected by disruptive behaviour. Exclusions have been high, especially for the current Year 9, but they are reducing as a result of recently introduced measures to improve behaviour. A few parents and students also raised concerns about bullying. Where bullying does occur, it is generally taken seriously and tackled effectively. Students generally feel safe and free from harassment. They also show good awareness of students who are physically disabled or vulnerable.

Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Students have opportunities to reflect, for example on past and current issues but some opportunities for reflection in assemblies and tutor sessions are not always utilised to the full. The schemes of work for

personal, social, health and citizenship lessons are good and this enables pupils to learn the importance of keeping safe and making safe choices.

Students have a satisfactory understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Students make a good contribution to the school and wider community and have good opportunities to exercise responsibility, for example through the prefect and peer mediation systems. They raise money for local and national charities.

Students are well prepared for their futures when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Some lessons are good and a few are outstanding. Teaching is better in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. In the better lessons teachers have high expectations and students respond well to the challenges set for them. Students' attitudes to learning are good. They are organised and keen to engage with the activities set. Many lessons are well structured, and students' understanding is checked with well focused questioning. In the very best lessons challenging activities encourage students to deepen their understanding and explore their learning with others. For example, in an RE lesson students developed their understanding of the five pillars of Islam through drama. The use of ICT has developed well since the last inspection and it is used effectively in lessons to enhance learning. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of focused teaching which relates well to their targets.

Where teaching and learning are satisfactory lessons do not always meet the full range of needs, and activities lack challenge for some students. As a result, students are not sufficiently engaged in their learning, or they make slow progress and do not achieve as much as they could. Students are not always given the opportunity to think in depth or research independently to extend their knowledge of the topic. Students are aware of their target grades. Assessment information is increasingly available, but it is not yet being consistently used in planning teaching and learning to ensure that the progress of all pupils in lessons is good. Marking is variable in quantity and quality and is not always sufficiently focused on how students can improve their work and reach their target grades.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. A strong feature is the different pathways available for students in Years 10 and 11. These provide opportunities that meet a range of needs and interests, and allow students to build on their prior attainment. The curriculum includes a good range of GCSE subjects and vocational courses. Vocational courses yield particularly successful results that enhance students' future prospects.

The range of provision for students in Years 7 to 9 is adequate. The school has recently introduced an innovative scheme in Year 7 for the joint delivery of combined humanities. Early indications are that this provision is helping standards to rise.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive appropriate additional support which enables them to access the curriculum and achieve well. There is increased provision for

ICT equipment across the school since the last inspection. It is well used in lessons and contributes to the school's drive for equality of opportunity.

Many students participate in and enjoy the extensive range of extra-curricular activities available at lunch time and after school. Visits to colleges, universities and places of work are raising expectations of what students can achieve in the world beyond school. A range of curriculum links have been established with external training providers that include catering, construction and motor vehicle maintenance. These are contributing to students' local employment prospects, personal development and a rise in overall standards.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support given to students are good. Health and safety arrangements are rigorous. Procedures for child protection and measures to safeguard pupils meet government guidelines. Induction procedures for Year 7 students are good and this enables pupils to settle quickly into the school. Students have ready access to personal help and advice from adults and they say they have someone to turn to if they are in difficulty. The pastoral care system is effective.

The personal support and guidance provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are strong. These students develop independence and important life skills, and make good progress academically. The students are fully included in school activities, including residential activities, and special arrangements are made when needed. There are strong links with external agencies to enhance the support given.

Systems for tracking progress have been strengthened, particularly in Key Stage 4, and effective interventions are planned. Students know the target grades and levels they are aiming for. They receive good advice and guidance in choosing their options, and in planning their next steps. However, registration and tutor time is not used as consistently or effectively as it could be to provide pupils with academic and pastoral support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Overall, the quality of leadership and management are good, and firmly focused on raising standards. The headteacher is leading the school well with the active support of a hardworking senior leadership team. There is a clear vision for the school's future, and the determined leadership and management of the head and senior team are significant factors in the school's progress. Improving school performance is a key priority that underpins the school's development plan. Positive action is underway to tackle this, for example, through improving curriculum provision, building a positive school ethos, a closer monitoring of the work of subjects, and better tracking of students' progress. The impact of these initiatives can be seen in the school's steadily improving GCSE results. Faculty and subject management are improving and are satisfactory overall. Monitoring and strategic thinking at this level are not yet consistent enough to ensure high quality teaching and learning, and results in tests and examinations vary too widely. Morale in school is good and staff are responding well to increasing levels of accountability. Governors are very supportive and monitor the school's performance carefully. They receive good information from the headteacher and are aware of what needs to be done to improve further. They are highly committed and carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Distinctive features, including the school's specialist status, and strong local partnerships are having positive impact on students' progress. Day to day management is very effective and the school runs smoothly. The school provides satisfactory value for money and its capacity to improve further is good.

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

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

31 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Highfield Humanities College, Blackpool, FY4 3JZ

We enjoyed visiting your school and we would like to thank you for making us welcome. We observed lessons and talked to a number of you and to some of the staff. We also looked at the results of questionnaires sent in by your parents. Many of your parents are very positive about the school, although a few do have concerns, mainly about behaviour.

We found that yours is a satisfactory school. Since the school was last inspected it has gained humanities specialist status and the examination results have improved a lot at Key Stage 4.

Most of you enjoy being at school. Attendance at your school has improved and is now about average. We found that most of you behave well in lessons and around school. The school cares for you well, especially those of you with additional needs. You are helped to settle in when you arrive in Year 7, and you receive good advice and guidance on Year 9 options, and choices when you leave school. Many of you take advantage of the good extra-curricular activities on offer.

The school provides a good range of courses and subjects for all of you in Key Stage 4, including GCSEs and vocational courses. At Key Stage 3 those of you in Year 7 are benefiting from a new integrated humanities project. GCSE results for your school are broadly average, reflecting the satisfactory progress that you make in school. The results for humanities subjects and vocational courses are good.

We found that teaching is satisfactory overall. Some of your lessons are good and a few are outstanding. Teaching is better in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. You know the grades and levels you are aiming for. We have asked your headteacher to work with teachers to improve teaching so that more lessons are as good as the best, especially at Key Stage 3. We have also asked them to look at how they use the data collected about your progress to plan lessons, and how they can develop the marking of your work so that you are given better guidance on how to improve. These will help to ensure that all of you make as much progress as you can and get even better results. You can help by attending regularly, working hard and doing your very best.

We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James HMI