

Great Yarmouth VA High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121219
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	313924
Inspection date	8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Hewitt

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	12–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	805
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Linda Fisher
Headteacher	Mr Jim Nixon
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2005
School address	Salisbury Road Great Yarmouth Norfolk NR30 4LS
Telephone number	01493842061
Fax number	01493332848

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The overall effectiveness of the school was evaluated and the following issues were investigated: how well students take responsibility for their own learning, how effectively the school evaluates its own performance and the impact this has on the pace of improvement.

The inspector gathered evidence from interviews with governors, staff and pupils, lesson observations, analysis of documentation and observations of the school during the working day. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This Specialist Technology College draws students from an area of high social disadvantage. The proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is below average. The number of students who are learning English as an additional language is below average, though this has increased steadily over the last three years. The proportion of students who find learning difficult is well above the national average. The school was awarded the Investors in People status in 2006. Currently the students enter the school in Year 8 and it will have the first Year 7 intake in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Great Yarmouth (VA) High School is a good school. It has some outstanding features; most notably students' achievement is exemplary. They enter the school with standards well below national averages and by the time they leave at the end of Year 11, the proportion of students achieving five or more passes at GCSE are in line with national averages. Given that the area includes significant severe social disadvantage, this represents outstanding progress. Achievement in English, mathematics and science is particularly impressive. Students who find learning difficult also make excellent progress.

At the heart of the school's ethos, is ensuring that youngsters can play a positive role in society as skilled and well-rounded citizens. Attendance is below average. A significant number of students struggle to attend school regularly but the school takes robust and rigorous steps to help students improve their attendance. One student commented, 'They just never give up on you, teachers really care'. Consequently, attendance has improved steadily over the last three years because of the good work the school has done in engaging youngsters in challenging circumstances. The school is on course to meet a target set by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

An outstanding feature of the school is the way in which the curriculum meets the needs of all learners by offering a wide range of additional activities extending beyond the school day and premises to engage students. The out of hours learning programme includes a range of provision for vulnerable students, which promotes their good personal and social development. The consequence of this tenacity is that students achieve extremely well despite the significant attendance difficulties. Promoting achievement is evident in all aspects of the school's provision. The success of this can be seen in the high number of students who are in employment, further education or training when they leave the school. The school responds quickly to students' changing circumstances by tailoring the curriculum to meet individual needs.

This vibrant school is led by a determined headteacher whose uncompromising pursuit of excellence inspires staff, students and parents. Senior staff and governors support him well and they embrace new ideas and approaches with relish. Leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They know that they need to do more work to strengthen the impact of the school's specialist college status and further develop students' reading and writing skills. Middle leaders provide good support for teachers and the new lesson observation system is beginning to help the school to identify how they could further improve teaching. The school knows that not all middle leaders are using the new system accurately and consequently teachers' ability to encourage independent learning is not as rapid as it could be. The exciting changes to the roles of the team leaders are also beginning to have an impact and have served to enhance the strong team spirit within the school. The capacity for the school to improve further is good.

Students behave well in lessons and around school and a strong feature of the school is the positive relationships between students and adults. Students feel very safe in school because of the excellent pastoral support. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Bullying is rare and, when it does occur, the non-teaching behaviour managers deal with incidents swiftly. Students enjoy their time in school and as a result, many students access extra-curricular activities. For example the school offers football training through its links with Norwich City Football Club. Parents also attend classes after school, for example, the school

has provided English lessons for a group of parents who are learning to speak English as an additional language. Consequently, the liaison between home and school is good.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons to match students' needs closely and give them appropriate challenge. Students are aware of how well they are doing and know what steps they need to take to improve their work. Consequently, they make excellent progress. Teachers work hard to develop a good work ethic and therefore students take pride in their work. Lessons include a range of interesting activities that engages students. However, in many lessons, teachers do not give students sufficient opportunities to develop the confidence to take responsibility for their own learning. The school is aware of this and leaders are developing strategies for improvement.

The school's work with its many partners is exemplary in securing support for students facing very challenging circumstances. This results in students concentrating on their work and excellent levels of achievement. The care and support offered by staff on a daily basis is outstanding. Youngsters speak warmly about the adults in the school and know they can seek assistance whenever they need it. Staff expect to be available for students throughout and well beyond the end of the school day. Students who struggle to attend are warmly welcomed when they do attend and teachers use the time they are in school well. As a result, they make the best progress possible whilst they are there. Teachers and other adults maintain high levels of contact with students and parents. This enables them to make sure youngsters are engaged in learning at every possible opportunity. The school is imaginative in seeking different methods of helping students with high rates of absence to keep up with their work, for example through text messages that remind students of the support that is available for them.

Achievement is the priority for staff and students and the success of this approach has resulted in an increasing number of students who go on to further education. A significant number of youngsters also have ambitions to go on to higher education, often the first in their family to do so. Parents quite rightly hold the school in high regard and one parent commented, 'I am very proud my child goes to Great Yarmouth High School.' This clearly demonstrates the schools' success in achieving its aim of raising the aspirations and expectations not only of the youngsters in its care but also of the local community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop school self-evaluation systems to improve students' independent learning.
- Further develop the impact of specialist school status on raising standards of students' reading and writing skills.
- Raise levels of students' attendance to be in line with national averages.

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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
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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
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
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?	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	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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	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	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

9 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Great Yarmouth (VA) High School, Great Yarmouth NR30 4LS

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school. I was impressed with how proud you are of your school. I can understand why you are so positive and I agree that you attend a good school. It makes sure you develop well personally and you make excellent academic progress.

The way staff care for you and support you is outstanding and this is one of the reasons for your excellent progress. You spoke warmly about Mr Nixon and told me how much he cares about you and wants you to do your very best. Your lessons are interesting and well planned to make sure everybody enjoys learning. You all know your targets and you told me how easy it is to get extra help because your teachers work so hard. I could see that you take a great pride in doing the best you can. You learn best when teachers help you to take responsibility for your work and I have asked Mr Nixon to make sure all your lessons help you to do this.

Mr Nixon and the other adults make sure the curriculum is exactly right for each one of you. This is especially true for those of you who find coming to school difficult. There are lots of activities and clubs for you to do outside lessons and I was impressed with how many of you attend them. When some of you do not attend school the teachers and other adults still find ways of helping you learn by sending work home or inviting you to extra curricular activities.

You are working hard to improve your reading and writing skills and I have asked your teachers to use your status as a specialist technology college to help you to do even better.

Your school is well led and managed. Mr Nixon and senior staff check the quality of your lessons regularly. Other teachers help and some of them do this very well. We have asked Mr Nixon to make sure staff always do this very well and this will help you to continue doing the best you can.

I think Great Yarmouth High School is a great place to learn and you can play an important role in making sure it gets even better by attending school every day and continuing to work hard.

Yours sincerely

Joan Hewitt

Lead inspector