

Hardenhuish School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126509
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	315577
Inspection date	6 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Brenda Cusdin HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1521
6th form	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Colin Smith
Date of previous school inspection	6 October 2003
School address	Hardenhuish Lane Chippenham SN14 6RJ
Telephone number	01249 650693
Fax number	01249 767388

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school, explored its strengths and investigated two specific issues: • whether students make good progress in Key Stage 4 • whether students make outstanding progress in the sixth form. Inspectors gathered evidence from discussions with staff. They scrutinised related documents and observed a sample of relevant activities and lessons. They studied the comments in 567 questionnaires returned by parents and testimonials from partners working with the school. Inspectors talked with students about the contributions they make and their experiences at the school. 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 in its Self-Evaluation Form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Hardenhuish School is much larger than most schools. Standards on entry in Year 7 are average. The large sixth form collaborates with the two other secondary schools in the town. Standards on entry to the sixth form range from students who achieved very highly in their GCSEs to those who meet the minimum requirements for entry to advanced courses.

The school has specialist provision for 30 students with severe specific learning difficulties/dyslexia. The overall proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to the national figure. The socio-economic circumstances of the students cover a wide span. There are pockets of social disadvantage in the town. More students join or leave the school after the start of Year 7 than nationally. Very few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few learn English as an additional language.

Hardenhuish became a specialist school in mathematics and computing in 2003. It has achieved many 'kite marks' for quality, for example, Schools Curriculum Award, Sportsmark, Healthy School Award, Quality Framework for careers, International Schools' Award, Eco Schools Award, Investor in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Students, parents, governors and staff rate Hardenhuish highly. They are proud of its good all-round education and particular strengths. This report confirms that their views are fully justified. Hardenhuish is a good school with some outstanding features, one being the excellent sixth form.

What is particularly impressive about Hardenhuish and why?

The headteacher and staff are passionate that their school should be a community that welcomes all students and offers everyone good opportunities. No students have been permanently excluded from the school in recent years and the number excluded for short spells is very low compared with other schools. Overall, behaviour is remarkably good, making the school a very safe place, and students' attitudes to learning are extremely positive, reflecting their tremendous enjoyment of school. One parent's comment sums this up well: 'All four of my children have blossomed since they started at this school. The school makes every effort to find what the kids do well. Staff praise, reward and encourage them so their confidence and enthusiasm for what they are doing grows.'

The headteacher and staff work constructively with partners. They have developed strong links to expand the ways they can help students with challenging behaviour and those beginning to cause concern. The staff liaise extremely effectively with primary schools. The induction programme is excellent and greatly appreciated by the pupils as it helps them settle quickly in Year 7. Parents find staff approachable. One parent commented, 'We have found the parents' forum very valuable, not only to gain information relating to our children's education but also we can bring up any worries. Any concerns have been addressed as a result of this two-way communication.'

The headteacher and staff want students to have a voice, get involved and take responsibility. The school has outstanding strategies for developing their citizenship skills and students are prepared exceptionally well for their future lives. Able, gifted and talented pupils relish opportunities to extend their thinking and knowledge. There is a wide programme of clubs after school and an unusually high take-up by girls in sporting activities, demonstrating students' exceptional awareness of the importance of keeping fit and healthy. The students are developing excellent personal skills. An illustration of the way in which students contribute to the community is the student who started an eco-club that promotes recycling, who said, 'It gives us a chance to help and do something that you like.'

The headteacher and staff want the school to keep moving forward and prepare youngsters for life in the 21st century. Up-to-date information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are used daily by staff and students, thanks to the school's specialist status. The Further Mathematics Centre is a very exciting initiative (funded by Mathematics in Education and Industry, MEI) where staff share their expertise with teachers and students in other schools. 'Green Hardenhuish' is a highly topical initiative led by the student council that will see a wind turbine and solar panels operating on the school site.

What is Hardenhuish focusing on and why?

In Year 9, standards are above average and achievement is good. The Year 9 students reached standards in 2007 that were exceptionally high in mathematics, above average in science and average in English. In Year 11, standards are average and achievement is satisfactory. The 2007

Year 11 students reached high standards in some subjects such as business studies, double science, design and technology, history, mathematics and religious education, but standards in English and ICT were not high enough.

The Year 11 cohort in 2007 had a small group of students with challenging behaviour and difficult personal circumstances. They successfully stayed in education throughout their secondary years but they underachieved significantly. The headteacher and staff are determined to learn lessons from this. Several developments have been in place for a few years and these, with other more recent steps, put the school in a stronger position to help students with similar problems achieve better.

The leadership group completely rethought the pastoral support. The new learning manager roles are concentrated on checking whether particular individuals are achieving well enough from Year 7 right through to Year 13. Extra posts, the non-teaching pastoral managers and the intervention manager, increase the school's capacity to spot, and help, individuals who need support. There are new ways to respond when underachievement is found, for example, Year 12 students mentor those in Year 10 who might benefit from their experiences of managing coursework and other pressures.

New curriculum leaders in English and ICT are tightening up teaching programmes in Key Stage 4 and showing students how to improve the quality of their coursework and become more familiar with examination expectations. The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has developed considerably in the last four years and is very well planned. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good gains in literacy skills in Key Stage 3, and progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory and also improving.

As a consequence of these developments, the school's assessments forecast that the current Year 11 students should make good progress from their starting points.

What could be better still?

The assessment of whether students will meet their targets is regular and the information is used effectively to track individuals' progress. It is not summarised or collated to keep a watching brief on the progress of particular groups of students over time, such as those on vocational courses or work placements. The tracking system does not easily indicate the degree of any underachievement because it lacks clear criteria for assessing this.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students make outstanding progress in the sixth form across a good range of academic subjects. The moral and social development of sixth form students is impressive. They are excellent role models for younger students and make very valuable contributions to the community both inside and outside school.

The care, guidance and support for sixth formers are superb. Staff ensure that students get a very good grasp of possible future careers and options. Specialist status has greatly increased the numbers of students studying advanced courses in mathematics. The marking of written work and discussion of targets help students understand what they need to do to achieve their goals and work smartly towards them.

High quality teaching in the sixth form is characterised above all by the emphasis on active learning, with students expected to think for themselves and work collaboratively in groups.

Lessons are planned cleverly to take account of individual needs, questioning is purposeful and relationships are excellent.

Leadership and management of the sixth form provision are outstanding, as illustrated by the sustained very high expectations of staff and students that deliver consistently high standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that achievement at Key Stage 4 is consistently good over time and across subjects.
- Improve the use of tracking information to evaluate the progress of groups of students.

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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	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
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	1	
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	1
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?	1	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	1
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	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	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

7 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Hardenhuish School, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN14 6RJ

Many thanks for our warm welcome. We greatly enjoyed meeting you. It was good to hear about your experiences of school life and the contributions that you make.

We found out a great deal during our visit. We agree with your parents, your staff and your governors that you get a good all-round education at Hardenhuish. You told us, and you showed us, that you are proud of your school. We were particularly impressed by some of the things that you rate highly too.

Sixth formers are taught exceptionally well, achieve extremely well and have a very good choice of advanced courses to study.

Your headteacher and staff want you to have a voice, get involved and take responsibility – and you do. You are developing excellent personal skills.

Your headteacher and staff work constructively with partners. They try very hard to ensure that everyone has good opportunities and no-one drops out. They want to prepare you thoroughly for life in the 21st century and exciting initiatives such as the 'Green Hardenhuish' project do just that.

The new pastoral structure is very good. Staff have been improving the monitoring of your progress so that they can spot anyone underachieving quickly and provide help. We think that gathering together information about particular groups, for example, how well those of you on vocational courses or work placements are achieving, would also be useful.

Year 9 students achieve well. Year 11 students achieve satisfactorily. There were high standards in some GCSE subjects last year but standards in English and ICT were not high enough. Your headteacher and staff have already made some changes so that students in Key Stage 4 should achieve well in all subjects. We agree that this is an important priority for the staff and for you.

You play a most important part in making Hardenhuish such a good school. We hope that you continue to do so.

Very best wishes

Brenda Cusdin Her Majesty's Inspector

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