

# Highcrest Community School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133514
<b>Local Authority</b>	Buckinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	316138
<b>Inspection dates</b>	31 October –1 November 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Nigel Fletcher HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Modern (non-selective)
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	810
6th form	99
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr G Rowland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Miss S Moynihan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	20 October 2003
<b>School address</b>	Hatters Lane High Wycombe HP13 7NQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01494 529866
<b>Fax number</b>	01494 472850

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## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Highcrest Community School is smaller than average. It opened in 2001 as a Fresh Start school and has had a sixth form since 2005. It serves a mixed socio-economic area in a county where there is a selective authority. Consequently, the overall attainment of students is below average when they transfer from primary school. Eligibility for free school meals is well above the national average. The school is a culturally diverse community, with approximately 50% of students coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students who have English as an additional language is higher than in most schools. The number of students who have learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. The school acquired specialist status in technology in 2006.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

'Highcrest is a very well run school which helps each child reach their potential.' 'I feel that Highcrest will get the best out of my daughter and she will thrive.' These views of parents are shared by many. The school may not yet be the best, but it is a good school with many outstanding features. Notable amongst these are the range of academic and vocational courses and the enrichment activities available across the school. The curriculum meets the needs of students well and there are excellent opportunities for additional sporting, cultural and personal development activities.

Although students reach standards that are below those found nationally, they make good progress overall compared with their attainment when they start the school. For example, in the national tests in Year 9, achievement in science is exemplary and ranks amongst the best in the country, although performance in English is more variable. The outstanding senior management team, supported by highly effective governors, sets a clear vision for the future of the school which is shared and supported by all staff. There is a strong ethos of continual improvement in both academic and personal achievement which pervades the whole school. There is a sense of common purpose that is shared by staff and students alike. The views of parents, students and the local community are much valued. School leaders have an excellent understanding of how the school is doing. They recognise that there are still improvements to make to ensure that all students reach their full potential, for example, with improving the quality of teaching and learning. Well developed plans are being effected such that improvements can already be seen.

The quality of care, guidance and support is exceptional and, as a result, the personal development of students is good and in some aspects outstanding. Parents report favourably on the progress and growing confidence of their children. In 2007 the school won a County Swan Award, acknowledging the work of the student council in many areas of school life including anti-bullying and personal safety. Students enjoy their education and behave well in lessons. When behaviour around the school is less than good, it is managed immediately and effectively. Students feel safe and are confident that they will receive excellent support if required. Many parents agreed that, 'the school goes out of its way to support students', irrespective of their ability or age.

Teaching is good overall, but some lessons are teacher-dominated and insufficient opportunity is given to students to participate and to develop the ability to work independently. However, the specialist status in technology is having a good impact on improving learning across the school. The school has made good improvements since the last inspection and has an excellent capacity to continue to improve. It manages its resources well and provides good value for money. As one parent summed up, 'I would recommend Highcrest to any parent.'

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 2

The quality of provision in the sixth form is good. In its short period of existence, it has made considerable progress through excellent leadership and management. The school has a flexible access policy to an outstanding curriculum with a wide range of options and a broad enrichment programme. It has grown rapidly since opening and now attracts students from other schools in the locality. Standards are broadly in line with the national average. However, when judged

against their attainment on entry, students make good, and improving, progress both in BTEC and GCE courses.

Students are looked after well and their personal development is outstanding. They communicate confidently with adults and relationships are excellent. There is high participation in the many opportunities to take responsibility and students play an active part in their community. Examples include organising school events, acting as prefects, and helping in local primary schools. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and the best lessons are well planned, creative and engage students in learning; they provide good opportunities for students to learn independently. Students were quick to comment that 'teachers want students to be fully involved in the lesson - they want them to be the focus of learning'. However, a few teachers dominate lessons and so miss opportunities to help students to take responsibility for their own learning.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise the overall quality of teaching and learning to improve attainment in national testing at all key stages.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students achieve well at Highcrest Community School, although they reach standards that are below the national average. Their attainment when they enter the school in Year 7 is below national averages, sometimes exceptionally so, and the proportion with high attainment on entry is much lower than average. In Years 7 to 9, they make good progress, representing a continued improvement in performance since the last inspection. In the core subjects, achievement in science now ranks amongst the best in the country, although students perform relatively less well in English.

Performance by the end of Year 11 has also improved over the past three years. Students make good progress due to the good quality of the teaching, and the improved resources through the school's technology specialism. Although attainment of the higher levels at GCSE is below average, students make good progress compared with their starting points. However, there is variation in achievement between subjects. The school is fully aware of what needs to be done to improve performance in those subjects, and improvements can already be seen. The proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grades A\* to G is above average, and all students achieved at least one pass.

The school analyses the performance of specific groups of students and takes action to address any differences. For example, it runs additional sessions for under-achieving students. As a result, there is little variation between the achievements of different groups.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The personal development and well-being of learners are good, and outstanding in the sixth form. Their excellent spiritual, moral and social development is demonstrated in their positive attitudes to learning, and the relationships they have with adults and with their peers. The

majority of students are well behaved and any instances of poor behaviour are managed well by staff. Attendance is good and students enjoy their education. Success is celebrated well throughout the school with a variety of merit awards. Students know that their views are listened to, respected and acted upon. For example, they influenced the choice of food offered at lunch times, and contributed to changes made to school uniform.

Students feel safe and secure because, as one parent said, 'things are dealt with when they occur and in a professional way'. Bullying is rare and any instances that occur are dealt with quickly and effectively. Students eat healthily at school and many take part in the wide range of sport and leisure activities. Students make significant contributions to the community, and to raising awareness of environmental issues. For example, the school achieved the Eco-Schools bronze award and Year 9 students are proud to be called Highcrest Eco-Ambassadors. Participation in the broad range of extra-curricular activities contributes to preparing students well for life after school, and their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Students progress well because of the good quality of teaching and learning. They show enthusiasm for learning, work hard and are keen to contribute their ideas and opinions. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students are appreciative of the expertise of the teachers, and parents acknowledge that 'the inspirational teachers make a big impact in any child's life'.

Teachers make use of a good range of strategies to ensure that learning is interesting and relevant for students. However, this is not the case in all lessons. When lessons are too heavily directed by teachers, the students become co-operative, but passive learners; they are given insufficient opportunities to participate or to develop individual learning skills. Teachers plan lessons well and the learning objectives are made clear to students, who understand what is expected of them. When teachers use effective questioning and discussion, students make good progress from exchanging ideas with others. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used frequently to support learning. Marking is regular, and in the better lessons, it provides good advice about what students need to do to improve. There are clear, comprehensive strategies for assessing and recording students' progress and this information is used well to keep students, and their families, informed about their progress. Parents are kept involved in the learning of their children through attendance at review days and parents evenings.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

There is an excellent curriculum built around individual needs. The school has a clear focus on helping students reach their full potential academically and personally, and evaluates the curriculum regularly. It makes every effort to personalise the curriculum to fit the different needs of its students. For example, students have the opportunity to follow academic and vocational courses, or undertake a vocational education programme including work experience and college placements. The school has developed excellent links with partner schools, the

local college, and the community. In the sixth form, there is a balance of vocational and non-vocational options. With a growing number of students applying to enter the sixth form, the school is expanding the range of subjects to respond to their needs.

The school provides a wide range of additional activities, such as clubs, trips and visits, as well as many sporting activities. These make an excellent contribution to the students' enjoyment of school life, to their physical well being, and to their strong cultural awareness. Lessons on 'learning to learn' greatly enhance the personal development and academic progress of younger students. A variety of enterprise activities develop the skills needed for future economic well-being.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

The quality of the care, guidance and support is outstanding. The school makes thoughtful and imaginative use of a wide range of outside agencies to ensure the students' welfare. Child protection procedures are well established and all statutory checks are in place. The school has a comprehensive and caring approach to supporting the most vulnerable students. As a result, their self-esteem is high and achievement is good. Parents agree that the support given to students when they move from primary to secondary school is exemplary. Students in need of support with basic literacy or numeracy skills are identified early and good strategies ensure their progress.

Students are set challenging academic targets which are reviewed regularly. Students know the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. Older students in particular talk confidently about their identified areas for improvement. The school monitors the progress of individuals, and different groups of students, and provides additional support where necessary. Parents stress that 'children are constantly encouraged to do well and are always supported in this'. As one student said, 'whatever happens, the teachers are behind you'. There is an established careers and advice programme allowing students to make informed choices for GCSEs and post-16.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 1**

**Grade for sixth form: 1**

Leadership and management are outstanding. Through inspirational and supportive leadership, and well supported by her senior team, the headteacher has sustained the school's drive to improve. The school uses management information well in setting challenging targets to raise standards. The impact is evident in the continuing upward trend in students' progress, and in the caring ethos for both staff and students. Committed middle leaders share the senior team's clear vision for school improvement.

The school has an excellent culture of self-evaluation firmly rooted in regular reviews of departmental and whole-school progress. The regular and rigorous monitoring of the quality of lessons results in an accurate understanding of the strengths, and areas for development, of all teachers. Professional development activities are increasingly effective in developing the

capacity of all staff. Consequently, the quality of teaching, although sometimes inconsistent, is improving.

The leadership and management of the sixth form are also outstanding. The school has made great strides over the last three years in developing an effective sixth form. Through the school's recent award of specialist technology status, ICT resources have improved considerably. Students have much better access to computers to assist with their learning. Governance is exemplary. Under the leadership of a well informed chair, governors understand their role well. They have an excellent knowledge of the school through regular visits and provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders. The school manages its budget well and provides good value for money.



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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	NA
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 <sup>1</sup> 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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	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?	1	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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

12 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Highcrest Community School, High Wycombe, HP13 7NQ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you, talking to your teachers and other staff and visiting lessons. Many of you and your parents told us how the good relationships between you and the staff meant that you enjoyed school and felt that you were progressing well.

You told us that your school provided a good education. We fully agree with this view and are satisfied that the school leaders have a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school has many strengths and we were particularly impressed by:

- the way the school is led by senior staff and the commitment of its staff
- the courses and other activities that the school provides to ensure that you have the best opportunities to make good progress both academically and socially
- the way the school looks after you, and the support it provides for those students who experience difficulties
- and particularly your attitude to learning and healthy living, and the way you treat each other with respect.

To make your school even better we have recommended that it:

- raises the overall quality of teaching and learning to enable you to improve your results in national tests.

The senior staff and governors know what needs to be done to improve the school and have plans to do it. We believe that if you behave well and work hard in lessons, and help the school put these plans in place, then standards will rise further. On behalf of the inspection team, thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and we wish you every success for the future.

Nigel Fletcher HMI

Lead Inspector