

Highgate Wood Secondary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102154
Local Authority	Haringey
Inspection number	323594
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Alison Storey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1420
Sixth form	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Imogen Pennell
Headteacher	Mr Patrick Cozier
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2005
School address	Montenotte Road London N8 8RN
Telephone number	020 8342 7970
Fax number	020 8342 7978

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Highgate Wood is a larger-than-average secondary. Over half of students are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups; about one in eight students are of Black heritage and one in twelve Turkish. Around 45 students are from refugee families. Nearly one quarter of students speak English as an additional language, the main home languages being Turkish and Kurdish. Very few are at an early stage of learning English. Boys outnumber girls, in some years by as many as two to one, although it is much less marked among the younger students. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is just below that found nationally; most commonly these students have behavioural, social and emotional needs, speech, language and communication difficulties or dyslexia. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is just above the national average.

The school has had specialist Arts status since 2002.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Highgate Wood is providing a satisfactory standard of education. Some aspects of its work are good and the parent who described it as 'moving in the right direction to be a really good school' was absolutely right. The headteacher and his senior team are clear what needs to be done to continue to improve and have already implemented plans to bring all aspects of the school's work up to the level of the best.

The school's motto 'Everyone Matters' epitomises the strong contribution it makes to community cohesion. Students develop a strong sense of social and moral purpose and a good understanding and healthy respect for each others' background and culture. Behaviour is generally good. Students relish opportunities to take responsibility within the school community, for example as peer mentors, and appreciate the significant voice they have in the life of the school. Students also make an important contribution to the wider community, developing their understanding of their place in the world by taking part in a wide range of projects in the local area and beyond. They regard these activities as one of the best things about school, alongside the wealth of experiences offered by specialist arts status and the quality of the sporting opportunities.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Almost all lessons are at least satisfactory and a considerable number are good or even outstanding. There are many positive features of teaching and learning. In particular, the school's programme of professional development has improved the number of lessons where work is well matched to students of all abilities. However, there are still some weaknesses, with some lessons dominated by the teacher talking. The school has identified through its own review process that there has not been a consistent emphasis across the school on the importance of coursework or homework as an integral part of learning. In response, there is much tighter monitoring of coursework this year and the use of homework is under review.

Standards have steadily risen since the last inspection. All groups of students make at least satisfactory progress from their broadly average starting points in Year 7. Higher-attaining students make good progress, which is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The school is successfully eliminating any underachievement of students of Caribbean and Turkish descent and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. By the end of Year 11 virtually all students achieve at least one qualification, most gain five or more passes and almost half achieve five or more higher grade GCSEs, including English and mathematics, which mirrors the picture found nationally. However, not enough students are making good progress because the quality of the guidance they get to show them how well they are doing and how to improve is variable, and until recently the systems to track all students' progress and ensure effective intervention have not been rigorous enough.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The well-led sixth form provides a good quality of education for its students. They receive very good guidance on joining the sixth form to make sure they choose the courses that match both their interests and abilities; equally they are well supported in their applications and preparation for higher education. Teaching is good. Students find most lessons interesting and challenging; they appreciate the range of subjects on offer and the efforts that the school makes to accommodate their needs. They speak highly of the help and support they receive in lessons

and appreciate the additional help they receive after school and during the holidays. Their personal development and well-being are good. Students value the security of a familiar school environment; they feel safe and get along well with each other. They play an active part in the school and the community. Students mature as independent and highly motivated learners; most make good progress from their starting points, successfully complete their courses and are able to access their higher education and career choices.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate at which all students make progress between Year 7 and Year 11.
- Develop teaching and learning, by ensuring students are actively involved in lessons and making better use of coursework and homework.
- Improve the use of marking and feedback so that students have a clearer picture of how well they are doing and 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

Standards have risen steadily since the last inspection. About three quarters of the students reach the expected level for their age in English, mathematics and, more recently, in science at the end of Key Stage 3, which is broadly average. Overall, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have kept pace with the national rate of improvement, although there have been variations between subjects, usually as a result of staffing difficulties.

Achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 11. There are variations between subjects and groups of students. It is good in English, mathematics and the specialist subjects of art, drama and music. Higher-attaining students make good progress as a result of training for staff which has led to better challenge for these students in lessons. Some groups of students, notably those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those of Turkish and Black Caribbean heritage, have, until recently, not made as much progress as they could. Inspection evidence shows that training for teachers, better use of support staff and a broader curriculum are having a positive impact and all groups of students are now making at least satisfactory progress. The school acknowledges that more students could make better progress. It has introduced a better tracking system and a more consistent and rigorous approach to the use of coursework and participation in intervention activities to ensure that all students reach the challenging target grades set for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school and year group councils have a strong voice in school life, giving students, as one said, 'a chance to contribute about Highgate Wood School and to give advice about how we can make it better'. Students describe the school as friendly. They feel safe at school, know who they can go to if they have any concerns, for example about bullying, and are confident issues will be sorted out. Students understand what it means to live a healthy lifestyle. Many take part in the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities, although a few opt out of

physical education lessons and students do not always make healthy choices about eating at lunchtime.

Students value the school's specialist status and the opportunities they have to be involved in theatre and musical productions, as well as physical education. Their view of other subjects is more variable, often linked to their perception of the quality of the lessons and the relationships with their teachers. Attendance is broadly average. It is better in the younger year groups than Years 10 and 11; punctuality is improving as a result of the school's efforts to encourage prompt attendance to school and lessons. A number of parents raised concerns about behaviour. Inspectors found that overall behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Most students take responsibility for themselves and behave well, but a minority sometimes need reminding what is expected of them in lessons, when in corridors or moving around the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

About half the lessons seen during the inspection were good and indeed a few were outstanding. Good lessons are characterised by an emphasis on developing students' skills as learners. In these lessons, teachers effectively combine their good knowledge of both their subject and the students. They build on students' previous learning by matching work closely to their needs and providing the right level of support or challenge. Teachers make sure that students are clear what they are learning and use strategies to engage them throughout the lesson. Good relationships are established, a brisk pace maintained and behaviour managed well so that there is a purposeful, working atmosphere.

However, there are still some weaknesses in teaching and learning. In some lessons there is too much talking by the teacher and work is not always matched well enough to students' different needs. As a consequence some students lose interest, while those that find it more difficult to manage their own behaviour become restless. As a result, progress in these lessons is slower. Until this year there has been inconsistent use of homework to support learning, and the emphasis on ensuring that coursework is completed and to a high enough standard has been variable across departments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Specialist arts college status makes a very strong contribution to the quality of the curriculum, from the enrichment days for the youngest students in Year 7, through to a range of popular and successful courses on offer in the sixth form. Students have excellent opportunities to develop interests and skills within the conventional curriculum and beyond. Sports clubs are another popular feature of extra-curricular provision and many of the school's teams achieve impressive competitive success. The curriculum is increasingly well matched to the range of students' needs and aspirations, with a growing provision of practical and vocational subjects. There is well-established and close liaison with outside agencies to widen students' experience of work and study. Opportunities to participate in projects in the wider community, alongside activities such as Model UN and international links, are popular and successful in developing a strong sense of responsibility among students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school's care and support for its students are strong. Transition arrangements are good and as a result students settle quickly. A holistic approach to identifying and meeting students' pastoral and academic needs ensures that a range of measures are used to help those students who need support. The team of support staff and mentors are key to students feeling well looked after. Procedures for safeguarding students are robust. They feel the site is secure and value the fact that teachers are on duty at the bus stop, and that there is a local police officer available on site to support and deal with their concerns.

The quality of academic guidance is less well developed. In some subjects, for example English, good practice is developing in involving students in assessing their own progress and setting targets for improvement, but this is not consistent across the school. Marking is variable. It is not always regular nor detailed enough to help students understand how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The cycle of reviewing departments and year groups ensures senior leaders know how well the school is doing and what the key priorities are for further development. Middle leaders make an important contribution to the process and are increasingly involved in decisions about plans for the future. Some are stronger than others, but senior leaders know where more support and challenge are still needed and have plans in place to address this. Governance is satisfactory; governors have a good working knowledge of the school, but do not take sufficient account of external evaluations of the school's work to satisfy themselves that the school's evaluation of its work is accurate.

The school is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for everyone. It understands the needs of the different groups it serves and works hard to include all students and their families, for example through the creation of a Turkish-speaking Home-School Liaison Worker post. The wide range of extra-curricular activities in the arts and sports are used effectively to improve participation by all groups. The majority of parents are positive about the school's work. Some took the opportunity of the inspection to raise issues; inspectors took account of their views in their investigations and in coming to their judgements. More often than not, any concerns were already known to the school and appropriate action is being taken; for example, the school is currently consulting with parents as to how to improve communication.

The improvements seen since the last inspection, particularly in the light of some of the staffing difficulties experienced, the quality of the planning for improvement and the strength of both senior and middle management, demonstrate that there is good capacity for further improvement.

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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?	3	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	3	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Highgate Wood Secondary School, London, N8 8RN

Thank you for the welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and learnt a lot about Highgate Wood from the discussions we had with you in meetings, lessons and around school.

We see that the school gives you a satisfactory standard of education, that some aspects of its work are already good and that the right things are in place to make it a really good school. These are some of the things we found it does well.

- You have really good opportunities to get involved in the arts and sports and projects in the local area. It was a pleasure to see the exceptionally high standards achieved by all of you in the production of 'Sweet Charity'.
- You develop a strong sense of what is right and wrong and a good understanding and respect for each others' background and culture.
- Sixth form provision is good and students achieve well.
- You are well cared for and supported.

Of course, there are things that can improve and we discussed these with your headteacher before we left. To help the school become even better, we have said that the headteacher and other staff should:

- improve the rate at which you all make progress in your learning between Year 7 and Year 11
- make sure that more lessons actively involve you and that you all complete your coursework and homework
- improve the way your work is marked and the feedback you get, so that you have a clearer picture of how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve.

I am going to ask you to help in making these improvements. Some of you told us you think the school should make you do your coursework. While we agree they should make sure that you complete it, the responsibility also lies with you! We also ask that some of you try harder to be well behaved at all times and punctual to school.

Yours faithfully

Alison Storey

Her Majesty's Inspector