

Highams Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103107
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	323756
Inspection date	4 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Wiola Hola HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1470
Sixth form	364
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Philip
Headteacher	Mr Anthony Perrett
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2005
School address	Handsworth Avenue Highams Park London E4 9PJ
Telephone number	020 8527 4051
Fax number	020 8503 3349

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following: achievement and standards; the quality of teaching and learning; the school's systems for academic guidance and safeguarding; and the impact of leadership and management on improving elements of provision and outcomes for students. Inspectors also checked on improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection.

Evidence was gathered from: the school's self-evaluation form and other review documents; nationally published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; observation of the school at work in lessons and at break times; discussions with staff, students and governors; and the parents' questionnaires.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. In these other areas, inspectors 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

The school is much larger than average. About 60% of students are White British. Others are from a wide range of backgrounds, mainly from other white or Caribbean backgrounds. The proportion of students with English as an additional language is above average but few students are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is average. A higher than average proportion of students have statements of special educational needs but the overall proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or difficulties is average. The main difficulties and/or disabilities are: specific learning; moderate learning; behavioural, emotional, and social; speech, language and communication; and some medical. The school became a specialist technology college in September 1997 and from September 2007 it has been a specialist technology and sports college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school with a good sixth form. Throughout the school, students' personal development is exceptionally high. In Years 7 to 11, students' academic progress is excellent. This is because teaching is good, students have impressive attitudes to work and learning, and the curriculum is outstanding. Moreover, the school's meticulous checking of each student's effort and attainment is highly effective in ensuring that progress is fast whatever the students' starting point. Students' achievement in the sixth form is good.

Outstanding leadership and management underpin the school's successes. As a result of extremely rigorous processes for keeping the school's work under review, and improving it, standards have risen. Overall test results in the end of Year 9 national tests have been maintained at above average levels for several years and, in 2008, rose markedly in English where standards are exceptionally high. GCSE results have also risen. In 2008, from broadly average starting points in Year 7, nearly eight in ten students achieved five or more GCSE grades A* to C, and nearly seven in ten gained these GCSEs including English and mathematics. This is well above average. The school has strengths in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and also elsewhere, most notably in design and technology. Students also speak highly of the work in physical education and performing arts. The school's status as a specialist technology and sports college has undoubtedly had a positive impact on educational outcomes.

Staff set consistently high expectations of students' work and behaviour. They contribute greatly to students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through thought-provoking assemblies, and high-quality personal care and guidance. Relationships are strong and supportive. Students say that incidents of less than satisfactory behaviour occur only very occasionally and are fairly dealt with. A great many opportunities exist for students to contribute to the school and local or wider community, participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and to take initiative. Students are courteous, welcoming, confident and respectful. They enjoy school greatly and this is reflected in attendance rates that are well above average. Students have much to say in praise of the school. An area they feel could be improved is in relation to some parts of the building, including the washrooms. The school is currently undergoing a major building project that is expected to greatly enhance the school's facilities. Further development is planned.

Lessons generally include a range of well-planned activities that closely meet the needs and abilities of the students. Some teachers are very skilled in the art of questioning students to probe understanding, encourage critical thinking and to develop learning. Some others are less so. The organisation of the curriculum is highly effective in providing for students' specific needs, through individual support, small group work, 'fast track' routes, and in the deployment of teachers, support staff, tutors and co-tutors to give extra attention or challenge where needed. The library and the computer rooms are in constant use in lessons, break times and after school by groups of students working with diligence and enjoyment. The school welcomes students from a local special school, for part of their learning. This is another example of the school's highly inclusive approach to learning.

Staff praise the school for the professional development opportunities they are given, and for the headteacher's encouragement to develop their skills, keep abreast of new ideas, and to be creative. Staff, as well as students, enjoy being in this school. There is a sense of both stability and innovation. The vast majority of parents are very happy with what the school offers. One

parent, typical of many, wrote: 'The school encourages children in all areas to try their hardest and to reach their full potential; my daughter also has fun - great combination.' A few parents feel that the school could take greater account of their suggestions or concerns.

The school has improved well since the last inspection. Not only have standards risen but leadership and management have been strengthened at all levels, particularly in checking on the quality of provision and improving it. The curriculum has been developed and this work continues. Governors are very well informed, are challenging as well as highly supportive, and play a vital part in ensuring that the school functions successfully and within budget. The school provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form (also known as the college) builds successfully on the inclusive ethos of the main school. Roughly half of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form. Other students from the surrounding area are welcomed. While some students come with high levels of attainment, attainment on entry is below average overall. The good teaching and outstanding care, guidance and support students receive enable them to complete courses successfully in the main. Standards are average overall. This represents good progress, given students' starting points. An increasing number of students are gaining university or other higher education places.

Students in the sixth form are very positive role models for younger students. They contribute much to school life through their mature, considerate and independent approaches. This is demonstrated, for example, by the commitment of the school council and college committee in organising an annual Christmas party for over a hundred senior citizens, and in students' willingness to support tutors in the main school. Students greatly value the relationships with teachers, characterised by trust and respect. The curriculum is good and has improved in recent years. The range of vocational courses has increased in response to students' needs and interests. Further developments are rightly being planned. Data about students' attainment are kept well but not analysed quite as methodically or thoroughly as in the main school. Nevertheless, students get good advice about how well they are doing and how to improve their work. Leadership and management in the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons, making even greater use of the school's excellent quality assurance processes to identify exactly what aspects of teaching and learning need to be improved and where.
- Improve, where necessary, teachers' questioning skills to involve more students in thinking deeply.

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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	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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	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	

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

17 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Highams Park School, London, E4 9PJ

Thank you for your welcome when two inspectors visited your school recently. We greatly valued the conversations we had with some of you. I write to tell you about our findings and encourage you to read the full inspection report when it appears shortly on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Highams Park School is outstanding. It enables you to achieve extremely well both in your academic work and in your personal development. The academic standards reached are well above average by Year 11, with strengths in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and also in design technology. You are confident, courteous and respectful young people, very well prepared for your future lives, and already contributing much to your school and wider community. Your attendance is well above average overall. The school is successful in helping you recognise your own skills and talents, and encourages you to develop them further. The headteacher and staff keep a very close check on your progress and provide you with an excellent curriculum, not just in terms of what you receive in lessons but also through an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. The sixth form is good and enables students to achieve well.

Your lessons are good overall. Some teachers are particularly skilful in setting tasks and posing questions that encourage you all to think deeply and develop your understanding of topics being learned. We have asked the school to increase the proportion of good and outstanding lessons, making clear to teachers exactly what elements of teaching and learning need to be improved and where.

The school is extremely well led and managed. It is constantly being developed because staff are enthusiastic and encouraged to be innovative. We urge you to let staff know if the work set is ever too hard or too easy so that teachers can give you the right support and challenge. We saw the building work in progress and heard how keen you and the staff are to make use of the new facilities, for sport and other areas of work.

I wish you all the very best for your time at this school and in the future.

Yours faithfully

Viola Hola

Her Majesty's Inspector