

Holyhead School

Inspection report - amended

Unique Reference Number	103517
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323848
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1028
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony McCool
Headteacher	Martin Bayliss
Date of previous school inspection	28 June 2006
School address	Milestone Lane Handsworth Birmingham B21 0HN
Telephone number	0121 523 1960
Fax number	0121 523 1969

Age group	11–16
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to a change to the report following a complaint

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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

Holyhead School serves the Handsworth area of Birmingham. Three times the national average number of students are eligible for free school meals. More than two thirds of students speak English as an additional language, although few are at the early stages of learning English. About a third of the school are from an Asian Indian background, a fifth are Asian Pakistani and another fifth are from a Black Caribbean background. The rest are from a range of different ethnic groups. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average. However, the school has double the national average number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The vast majority of these are moderate learning difficulties. The school was designated a specialist business and enterprise college in September 2004. The school has recently started to offer post-16 courses, in collaboration with another school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features. The school has a well-deserved high reputation in the community. This success stems from the charismatic and enthusiastic leadership of the headteacher. Students come to the school with a wide range of abilities and aspirations. Attainment on entry to the school is below average. However, students achieve well and the school has managed to ensure examination results in Year 11 are consistently very close to average. Care, support and guidance are highly effective in ensuring the vast majority of students reach their targets. The school is rightly very proud of its record of ensuring that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve extremely well. These strengths contribute to students' outstanding personal development and well-being. Students' social, moral and cultural development is first class. Students enjoy school, particularly valuing the many opportunities they have to make a positive contribution. This is typified by the school's all-age tutor system which provides daily opportunities for older students to care and guide other students. Attendance levels are well above those in similar schools and behaviour is good. The school manages the challenging behaviour of a small minority well.

The curriculum is also outstanding, especially in Years 10 and 11 where students enthused about the many courses on offer. Virtually all students participate in a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. The school's specialist status is having a strong impact on improving the school. Business and enterprise skills are enhancing students' learning in all subjects and are a significant factor in students developing high-level workplace skills. Teaching and learning are good. A wide range of strategies are used to make most lessons interesting, often involving information and communication technology. Teaching assistants are deployed well to support students experiencing difficulties. Some highly effective teaching was seen that contributed to students' ability to learn for themselves. However, in a minority of lessons teachers talk for too long and do not allow students, particularly the most able, enough time to solve problems on their own.

Leadership and management are good. The school is prepared to be bold in seeking improvement and thinking longer term. This includes working with a very wide range of partners and a willingness to support other schools in their quest for improvement. The emphasis given to a longer-term vision is matched by the careful attention given to the day-to-day aspects of running a school. Senior staff lead by example and are regularly to be seen around the school reinforcing expectations.

Self-review is accurate and focused on ensuring every individual student can achieve. The school is enthusiastically embracing many initiatives to bring about improvement. However, some are not sufficiently focused on teaching and learning, particularly to improve the rates of progress of groups of students who are not doing quite so well. Community cohesion is a strength largely because of the very good links the school has with its diverse community. Governors are well organised, highly skilled and very committed to ensuring the school has the right targets that will make the school even better. The school's success in improving the achievement of middle- and lower-ability students is evidence of the school's good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching by ensuring a higher priority is given to making learning more challenging, enabling students, particularly the most able, to solve problems on their own.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

By Year 11, students achieve average standards. In view of the students' below average starting points this represents good achievement. The school has improved the numbers of students gaining five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, since the last inspection in 2006. In the period 2006 to 2008, GCSE results have been very close to the national average. This improvement is largely a result of effective interventions targeted at individual students. All groups of students make good progress but the school does particularly well in ensuring students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. For quite a period of time more able students have not made such good progress as those of lower ability. However, the school is now taking effective action to improve the progress made by the ablest students.

In terms of subjects, results have fluctuated in English and mathematics. Inspectors found evidence of outstanding progress with above average standards in English. Mathematics results in 2008 were disappointing, but improved teaching is ensuring students are making better progress in this subject. All the specialist college targets were met or exceeded and the progress students make in business studies is particularly impressive.

Indian and Black Caribbean students make particularly good progress. Girls' attainment is higher than the boys' although the gap is narrowing as a result of interventions made by the school. Standards and achievement are lower in Years 7 to 9 although improvements in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 and 8 are being made. Basic literacy skills are now well developed.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students are proud of their school and enjoy the activities it offers. They are growing into mature and responsible young adults. Relationships are positive and there is a strong community ethos. Attendance rates are above average, particularly when comparisons are made to similar schools. Students report that bullying is rare and it is dealt with quickly and fairly when it does occur. Students feel safe because 'there are always teachers around to take care of you'. They are aware of safe practices and act sensibly in practical lessons in science, technology and physical education. Behaviour overall is good. During the inspection, behaviour was impeccable but students reported that occasionally, in less-interesting lessons, the behaviour of a small minority could interfere with learning. Students willingly take on responsibilities. The school council is an important voice on school matters and has succeeded in changing many aspects of school life. Students participated in the planning of the healthy schools programme and this is evident in their positive questionnaire responses and their awareness of this area of the curriculum. Most students live healthily. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplary. Students develop a clear sense of right and wrong and a strong respect for others. The all-age tutor system adds greatly to students' social development. The many different ethnic and faith groups were observed to get on very well with each other. Students spoke of the strong sense of harmony in the school. The social development of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good because they are included very well in all aspects of school life. Students are very well prepared for their future economic well-being because they achieve well and they learn a great deal about the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use a wide range of appropriate resources and activities to maintain students' interest. Lessons are usually well planned with clear objectives and time is almost always made available for students to give teachers feedback on how confident they feel about the concepts they are learning. This frequently informs the planning of the lessons which follow. Resources, including the deployment of teaching assistants are used well to support less able students. Lessons are invariably taught at a good pace with frequent reference to targets, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Teachers ask searching questions and in the better lessons ensure that all students think for themselves about the answers. Group-work and paired discussion are used to improve the opportunities students have to think more deeply about their responses. Teachers observe very carefully how students are responding and will frequently intervene where there is evidence of students experiencing difficulty. This was most effective where these interventions supported students in solving problems for themselves. In a minority of lessons teachers talk for too long and do not provide sufficient opportunities for independent learning. This slows progress particularly for the more able.

Marking is frequent and generally helpful, is related to students' individual targets and encourages good presentation. Increasingly, students' work is computer based. Exemplary marking was observed in English and history but in other subjects there were inconsistencies in the quality of written feedback, sometimes within the same department.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

All students in Years 7 to 11 follow an interesting and stimulating curriculum that is carefully tailored to meet their individual academic and personal needs. Older students are very positive about the wide range of courses on offer, both academic and vocational. This helps maintain their interest and provides appropriate challenge for all students, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The school has further enhanced its curriculum with the introduction of a range of post-16 courses in partnership with another city school. The school's specialist business and enterprise status is impacting very well on the curriculum, both within and beyond the specialist subjects. In addition, specialist status has further developed links with local schools, the community, business and higher education. An example of this includes a recent visit by some Year 9 students to Aston Police Station, as part of a 'World of Work' unit, where students' communication and leadership skills were developed within a work environment. Some students self-manage a 'Young Chamber of Commerce'. They plan and carry out a wide range of business related activities in school, including the running of a retail unit, generating profits for the school. Students really valued these opportunities and see the benefit both within and beyond their lessons. The extra-curricular provision is wide and varied enabling students to take part in activities including sport, music, supported learning and many more. The school monitors student participation in such activity. This shows that the school is successfully involving almost every student and also targeting these activities on students with the greatest need. The curriculum is well adapted to meet the needs of students, for instance, those with low literacy levels have more English lessons so they can catch up.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an extremely caring and supportive environment where students can flourish as individuals. Students and parents commented very positively on this aspect of the school's work. Rigorous monitoring of attendance and effective strategies support students whose attendance slips. Behaviour management is pre-emptive and effective, which is reflected in the calm and pleasant atmosphere in the school. Arrangements for safeguarding students, including child protection procedures, are robust and reviewed on a regular basis. The school is strengthening links with parents and communicates effectively with families. There are good links with feeder primary schools so that students settle quickly into Year 7. This aspect is strongly underpinned by the responsibility for mentoring given to older students. The all-age tutoring system is a strength of the school, with beneficial effect, both social and academic. Students and staff speak highly of the collegiate system and of its impact on academic mentoring and social development. There is great commitment from staff to ensure that all students maximise their educational and social opportunities. The needs of all ethnic, gender and faith groups are met, resulting in successful outcomes, both academic and social. The school works extremely well with outside agencies, for instance in ensuring students in care receive the support they need. The support of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is superb in that it ensures they achieve very well and are fully included in the life of the school.

Students know their targets and how to improve. Heads of college, tutors and subject teachers work closely to provide support as soon as there is a hint that students might not achieve a target. Successful booster groups enhance literacy, enabling students with English as an additional language to become confident and competent learners. The school promotes healthy lifestyles effectively in a range of contexts.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school seeks the views of parents and students well and is using this information to monitor the impact of the changes made. The leadership of the headteacher inspires all members of the school's community. There are good opportunities for a wide variety of staff to be involved in decision-making. Leadership development is taken very seriously and the impact of this was apparent in the discussions with leaders at all levels. The school is undertaking many improvement activities although some do not always give sufficient emphasis to learning and student progress. Targets are used well to motivate students and their parents. The school has challenging targets; it has used them effectively to monitor some aspects of school performance and is now using them better to monitor other aspects, such as the progress of more able students. Monitoring and evaluation is systematic and involves all leaders appropriately. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and correctly identifies the need to improve teaching and learning. The school focuses very well on each individual student's experience of school. However, it sometimes misses important perspectives because monitoring does not always fully consider the different abilities of students. The school's work on improving the attainment of boys provides good evidence of the school's commitment to promoting equality. The school is cleverly starting to use the road from the school to Holyhead in Wales as a vehicle for increasing students' knowledge of other parts of the country. The school is beginning to develop links with schools with a majority of students who are White British in order to contribute to the

development of a positive sense of being a citizen in modern Britain. Governance is good. Governors bring a wide range of experience, energy and commitment to their role. They challenge the school for instance by insisting on clear targets that can be used to hold staff to account. They recognise the need to further prioritise improvements to teaching and learning to further increase the achievement of middle- and higher-ability students. The day-to-day financial management of the school is highly effective and the school is making the most of its overly compact 1960's building.

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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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
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	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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 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

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	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

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

3 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Holyhead School, Handsworth, B21 0HN

We would like to thank the many students we interviewed for their contribution to the inspection. Those of you who acted as guides deserve a special mention for the time you gave to this activity.

There was a lot going on during our visit but this did not seem to faze you. Your behaviour was impeccable during our visit and we were impressed with the pride in your school shown by you and your staff. We liked your school a lot and concluded that your school is good with many outstanding features. All students, but especially the least able, achieve very well. Your personal development is outstanding, largely because the school cares for you so well. The curriculum is also outstanding, especially in Years 10 to 11 where students really appreciate the courses on offer. We think your headteacher has done well in improving the school so that its reputation in the community is high.

Teaching and learning are good because in most lessons you learn well and develop the ability to think for yourselves. You told us that in a minority of lessons teachers do not provide enough opportunities for you to discuss issues and solve problems for yourselves. Our observations confirmed that this was the case which explains the one key issue for improvement we have highlighted in the inspection report. This asks the school to ensure all lessons have you actively involved. We hope this will result in you experiencing more really good lessons.

You can help by providing regular feedback to your teachers about how successfully you think the key issue is being addressed. We are confident that your school will listen to your views and respond because we know how much your staff are committed to making Holyhead School even better.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Kevin Sheldrick

Her Majesty's Inspector