

Harper Green School and Art's College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105257
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	324191
Inspection date	26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Patrick Geraghty HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1447
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul McCarthy
Headteacher	Mr P Stewart
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2006
School address	Harper Green Road Farnworth Bolton Lancashire BL4 0DH
Telephone number	01204 572941
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the achievement of students, the quality of teaching and learning, and the effectiveness of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from published assessment data, the school's own records, parents' questionnaires, lesson observations and interviews with staff and students. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the 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

Harper Green School is a larger than average mixed comprehensive school. The school serves an area of social and economic disadvantage and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is twice the national figure. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also higher than the national average. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is above average. The school's population is largely White British with a small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has specialist Arts College status and has achieved the Healthy Schools status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This school's overall effectiveness is good. Self-evaluation by senior leaders and department heads is rigorous and areas needing improvement are securely identified. Students feel happy, safe and engaged in their work. The school offers a lively community where students are encouraged to improve and develop self-confidence and ambition. Arts College status adds significantly to this ethos. The school has made good progress in tackling the key issues raised in the last inspection report. The self-evaluation acknowledges the need to further embed literacy skills across the curriculum and tackle the underperformance in English at Key Stage 4.

Standards are broadly average and achievement is good. When students join the school in Year 7, the standards they have reached in their work are well below average. Low literacy levels present a considerable barrier to learning for many students. By the end of Year 9 the standards they achieve are broadly average and their progress is good. Students make very good progress in mathematics and science and across a range of subjects at Key Stage 4. From 2007 to 2008 the proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades increased from 49% to 61%. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics was, however, below the national figure due to some underachievement in English. Since September 2008, effective and targeted strategies have had a positive impact on raising achievement levels in English. Targets set for individual students now reflect higher expectations by teachers. The use of assessment data to identify and rectify students' underachievement and to inform them of what they need to know, or be able to do, to achieve their targets is now well developed. Evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of students' written work and the school's tracking procedures indicate progress is now good in English and standards are rising. Results from the early entry GCSE in English language in November 2008 demonstrate significant improvement with 38% of the total Year 11 cohort already achieving at least a grade C. Year 10 are on line to reach similar standards and to make good progress overall. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are making good progress.

Personal development and well-being are good and make a significant contribution to students' good progress. Students enjoy school and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enriched by a range of opportunities. Students feel safe and say that the few incidents of bullying that occur are dealt with effectively. Students feel valued. Behaviour is good around the school and in lessons. Students increasingly enjoy school, which is exemplified in improving attendance rates. Students understand the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and feel well informed on the importance of exercise. This is reflected in the high level of participation in the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available to them during lunchtime. Students contribute to the wider community through fund-raising activities and through the arts and community groups. There is good preparation for their future education and employment through citizenship programmes and enterprise activities. The school has been particularly successful in reducing the numbers of those not in employment, education or training from 16% in 2006 to 7% in 2008.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and there are examples of outstanding practice. The dissemination of good practice is embedded across the curriculum through the work of the effective and influential teaching and learning group. Relationships between students and teachers are good. Assessment for learning has been increasingly embedded. Peer assessment is effective. The Arts College status has impacted on improvements to teaching and learning

with many vibrant cross-college initiatives. There is a greater range of teaching styles to meet specific learning needs. Students are given good opportunities to work independently and in groups. Greater and more appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT) has enhanced learning. There remain a few lessons where there is variation in the quality of teaching and learning and where lessons are too teacher led.

Curriculum provision is good and increasingly well matched to the wide range of different student needs. Statutory curriculum requirements and entitlements are met. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has improved since the last inspection and there is now a good balance between academic and vocational courses. Changes to curriculum in science and mathematics have enabled better progress by students. The provision of ICT in support of teaching and learning is good. Flexibility and effective collaborative arrangements with other institutions enable the curriculum to be more closely tailored to individual requirements. There is good provision for the minority of students at risk of disaffection through an alternative curriculum. An extended curriculum has been developing through initiatives such as the completion of a hair salon with 30 Year 10 and 11 students now following Level 1 courses. The Arts College promotes many cross-curriculum initiatives to develop more active learning. Effective partnerships with local colleges provide additional opportunities in a range of vocational areas such as construction. The school has taken a number of initiatives to promote literacy skills: for example, the introduction of extra literacy lessons in Years 7 and 8 and functional skills lessons in Year 9. However, the school acknowledges that the curriculum requires further initiatives to tackle low literacy levels on entry. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and in the provision of additional learning support sessions.

Care, guidance and support for students are good. Partnerships with primary schools are enhanced by Arts College status. Students know who to turn to for support and appreciate the care provided particularly by year teams. Students receive good guidance to make informed decisions. Those students who are underachieving or who are at risk of disaffection are supported well by a range of interventions and mentoring programmes. Good partnerships with external agencies increase support for vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Views of students and parents are sought and acted upon. Procedures for safeguarding students meet current Government requirements.

Leadership and management are good. Strong and highly effective leadership by the headteacher promotes a culture of continued and sustainable improvement. He is ably supported by a senior team that ensures that the vision is shared by all staff and students. The school self-evaluation is acute, critical and developmental: it is a working document that is at the heart of the school's effective quality assurance processes. Middle leadership has been strengthened and provides a more analytical and evaluative approach to departmental leadership and quality assurance. The tracking and monitoring of student progress is systematic and purposeful. Communication throughout the school is good. Governors play an active role both in supporting and challenging the leadership with the utmost rigour: they are actively involved in the school. For example, governors recently completed their first community cohesion audit of the school along with a set of recommendations for changes to practice, all of which have been acted upon quickly. The school's specialist arts status is well managed and used effectively to enhance the curriculum and share good practice. Corridors and classrooms are festooned with relevant displays and work. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities including a jazz band, music concerts, theatre productions, dance events, art exhibitions, theatre visits and sundry projects with primary schools and community groups. The successful and popular Farnworth Arts Festival is organized and supported by the school. The school has developed good links with the local

community and actively responds to cultural diversity and community needs by providing a strong aspirational culture and drive. This is further enhanced by opportunities for students to experience a variety of local religious communities. The Arts College adds much to good community cohesion. Overall, structures are in place to ensure a good capacity to bring about further improvements. The school gives good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed effective literacy programmes across the curriculum.
- Increase the percentage of students gaining higher grades at GCSE in English.

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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?	2
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	2

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
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	2
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	2

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?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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	2
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**

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed our day at your school. We particularly enjoyed talking to so many of you about your work, interests and how much you enjoy and give to the school. We were impressed by your good behaviour and how tidy and cared for you keep the school. Your school is making good progress. The school is very well led. The headteacher, staff and governors are working hard because they want you to do the very best you can.

Overall your achievement and examination results have improved over the last few years. You enjoy many of your lessons, particularly when you know that you are improving and learning. However, results in GCSE English have not improved sufficiently well in recent years, the headteacher and teachers are working hard to tackle this because they know how important it is for you.

There is much good teaching in the school and in these lessons you respond well to the teachers' high expectations and you make good progress. Your curriculum options are good. You enjoy a wide range of extra activities. We were particularly impressed with how many of you take part in the creative arts subjects such as music, art and drama. The teachers and support staff care for you and give you good guidance.

We have asked your school to:

- increase the percentage of students gaining higher grades at GCSE in English
- take steps to improve your reading, writing and communication skills across all subjects.

We are sure that you will make even better progress in the future.

All the inspection team wish you well for your future education.