

Helsby High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111440
Local Authority	Cheshire
Inspection number	325383
Inspection date	15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Chambers 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1403
Sixth form	278
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr T Payton
Headteacher	Mr R Evans
Date of previous school inspection	9 March 2006
School address	Chester Road Helsby Frodsham Cheshire WA6 0HY
Telephone number	01928 723551
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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: students' achievement; students' personal development; the effectiveness of academic guidance and the impact of the school's specialist status. Evidence was gathered from lesson observations, assessment data, school documentation, observation of the school at work, discussions with staff and students and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but there is 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

Helsby High School is a large school that serves the villages of Helsby and Frodsham and the surrounding districts of north-west Cheshire. The school has plans to integrate a large number of additional students when a neighbouring school closes in September 2009. The surrounding area has relatively low levels of social disadvantage and the proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals is below average. Over 97% of the students are White British in origin. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational need. The school is designated as a High Performing Specialist School with a specialism in science and is a Leading Edge school; it holds the Inclusion Charter Mark and the Healthy School award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Helsby High School is a good school with several outstanding features. It is an improving school where students achieve well. Standards are well above average and are rising. Students enter the school with attainment that is above expectations for their age. In 2007, the school's results in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations were well above national figures. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics was 76%, compared with a national average of 46%. Provisional results for 2008, and evidence presented by the school during the inspection, suggest that high standards are being at least maintained. The school meets its challenging targets. Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well overall. During Key Stages 3 and 4 they make outstanding gains in their learning and considerably larger gains than similar students in other schools nationally. In the sixth form, students' achievement is satisfactory.

The school's specialist status has a strong and increasing influence on standards, the curriculum and the local community. Cross-curricular 'themed' weeks, focusing, for example, on science and technology, enterprise or healthy living have contributed to students' excellent economic awareness. The specialist subjects play a leading role in the school's excellent provision for the most able, including opportunities to study three sciences and AS level mathematics modules in Year 11 and involvement in regional and national competitions. Designation as a Leading Edge school in April 2008 has resulted in more teachers contributing to staff development. Well-chosen initiatives include strengthening partnerships with other providers and developing teaching and learning within the school.

The headteacher and the senior leadership team lead the school very well and have successfully created a shared sense of purpose among staff. A large number of teachers have taken on additional responsibilities, with the effect that leadership skills are developed effectively at many levels. The school is a truly inclusive community; all staff value the needs of individual students and promote equal opportunities very successfully. Parents strongly support the school and its inclusive nature; the overwhelming majority also say that their children enjoy their education and that behaviour in school is good. One typically positive comment was: 'Both my children enjoy Helsby High School for different reasons, which shows that the school caters for individual children and provides them with an enjoyable and high-standard education'. Overall, leaders evaluate the school's provision effectively and their plans for further development are well focused. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school and provide good support and challenge. There has been good improvement since the last inspection; the strengths that were identified have been built upon and the school demonstrates good capacity to improve further.

The quality of teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and good planning lead to lessons where students participate readily and work well with their fellow students. This takes place within an overall, outstanding curriculum. Strengths in provision are particularly evident in Key Stage 4, where students benefit considerably from a broad range of academic and vocational opportunities. These include Applied GCSEs in science, health and social care and a Young Apprenticeship programme in hospitality and catering. There is an effective programme in Key Stage 3, to promote students' ability to be independent learners, and to enable them to develop their thinking skills. In Year 7, the Cognitive Acceleration in Mathematics Education (CAME) programme has improved students' motivation and involvement in solving problems, although it is too soon to evaluate its impact on their achievement.

The care, guidance and support given to students are good overall. All the required safeguarding procedures are in place. The school caters extremely well for the needs of the most vulnerable students and works effectively with outside agencies to engage students who are at risk of disaffection. Academic guidance is satisfactory. The systems that are in place to monitor progress and support potential underachievers make a clear contribution to students' achievement. However, some students are unclear about the level at which they are currently working and their expected end-of-year level.

Students' personal development is excellent. This is a result of the good pastoral care and support that they receive and the good management in the school. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. Their cultural understanding is enhanced through links with schools in Grenoble and trips to places of religious worship. Students enjoy what the school has to offer and demonstrate this through their excellent attendance and their eagerness to participate in the many and varied extra-curricular activities that are available. For example, large numbers of students participate in sports clubs and musical activities, such as the highly regarded school band. The students' high level of concern for others is exemplified by the involvement of 120 Year 11 students in 'community challenge' projects, such as organising a community party. The students' outstanding behaviour is the result of the teachers' high expectations and excellent management skills. The school's leading role in the project for developing the social and emotional aspects of learning has helped students to become more self-aware and to manage their feelings and emotions more effectively.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards in the sixth form are above average. Able students attain very high standards, but on average, standards are lower than in the main school. This is because of an open-access policy which encourages students of a range of abilities, not just the most able, to continue their studies. Retention rates are good and students make satisfactory progress. Improved procedures are now in place for identifying underachievement and supporting students in their study. These are beginning to have an impact on raising standards, but their effect is yet to be fully realised. Many students develop good independent learning skills. Leadership is satisfactory and is starting to have a positive impact on guidance and standards. For example, the provisional examination results for 2008 show an improvement on 2007. Students' personal development is outstanding; they enjoy their time in the sixth form and make an excellent contribution to the life of the school, such as helping younger students through the peer support group or acting as prefects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve students' achievement in the sixth form.
- Ensure that students are clear about at which level they are working and what they are expected to achieve.

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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	3
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	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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?	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	
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	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?	2	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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	3
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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**

Inspection of Helsby High School, Frodsham, WA6 0HY

As you are aware, your school was recently inspected; I am writing to you to let you know our findings. I would like to thank you for your welcome and help during the inspection.

You will be pleased to learn that we agree with your headteacher, governors and staff: Helsby High School is a good and an improving school. You make good progress in your learning because of the good teaching that you receive.

You benefit from opportunities to study an outstanding range of different subjects. What the school offers suits your needs extremely well. The vast majority of you clearly enjoy school and demonstrate this through your excellent attendance and eagerness to take an active part in lessons. But Helsby High School is about more than just the lessons and a large number of you also take part in extra-curricular activities. For example, my colleague and I were impressed that so many of you participate in sports clubs and musical activities, such as the highly regarded school band. You deserve credit for your excellent behaviour; well done!

Your school is led well. In order to make your school even better, I have asked the headteacher, governors and staff to ensure that:

- those of you in the sixth form achieve better
- you know the level at which you are working and the level you are aiming for.

You can play your part in school improvements through maintaining your excellent attendance and taking full advantage of all the support that is on offer. I wish you all the best.