

Highfields School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 112950 |
| Local Authority | Derbyshire |
| Inspection number | 325726 |
| Inspection dates | 25–26 February 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | David Simpson HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 1414 |
| Sixth form | 247 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr Atholl Donaldson |
| Headteacher | Dr Ramsey Tetlow |
| Date of previous school inspection | 2 March 2006 |
| School address | Upper Lumsdale Matlock Derbyshire DE4 5NA |
| Telephone number | 01629 581888 |
| Fax number | 01629 57572 |

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 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

Highfields is a larger than average secondary school. Attainment on entry is above average although there is significant variation within year groups and between different classes. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below average. The proportion of the school's students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is around the national average. The school consists of two sites separated by nearly two miles. Students in Years 7 and 8 receive their education on one site and the remainder on the larger site. Highfields attained performing arts specialist school status in September 2005.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Highfields is a satisfactory school with several strengths. Its students develop well into mature and considerate citizens who take an active part in school life and the community. A commendably high proportion of students participate in sports leadership awards which enable them to take on responsibility and help others. The school's split sites are not the easiest of learning environments, nevertheless students treat them with care and their conduct is orderly. The school's specialist performing arts status significantly enriches the students' education. The school has a clear rationale of how the status promotes the students' confidence and self-esteem which has a positive impact on their attitudes to learning.

Highfields provides good care, guidance and support. Staff are committed to the welfare and security of students and provision has been strengthened by recent improvements to the tutorial programme and the deployment of teaching assistants in lessons. The school has a clear understanding of the needs of the local community and has established effective links locally, nationally and internationally to provide students with a strong understanding of diverse faiths and cultures and of people from different backgrounds. Consequently community cohesion is good.

Students make satisfactory progress academically as they journey through the school and standards are above average. Notably more than 70 % of students in 2008 attained five or more higher GCSE grades which surpasses the school's attainment in previous years. However, this masks some significant variation between groups of students. As a result, the school has correctly identified that lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not make as much progress as their peers. The school is working hard to improve students' attendance, tackle low aspirations amongst those who come from particular areas of its catchment and most importantly to improve the education provided by Highfields so that it better meets the needs of all groups of students. The recent introduction of suitable vocational courses and alternative qualifications to GCSE, together with extending provision in the performing arts, are proving to be motivational and improving students' progress. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and improving but there is too much variation both across the school and in some subjects. At its best, some of which is outstanding, teaching shows good subject knowledge, effective rapport with students which builds upon their good behaviour to maintain sustained challenge, and relevant homework is set. However, in some lessons teachers' planning takes too little account of the different needs of individual students to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable. As a result, the pace of these lessons is slow and teachers do not give students enough opportunities to learn independently or in groups. The school is rightly in the process of adopting a new policy for assessment, reporting and recording. At present there is too much variability in the use of information about the students' prior attainment and the students' understanding of what they need to do next to improve, and marking lacks rigour.

The headteacher has a clear set of priorities for the school's future development. He is well respected throughout Highfield's community and he is very knowledgeable about the school's work. He has developed a leadership team whose members all have responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating the work of subjects and year groups. The perception of how this works in practice varies and the quality of the middle managers' leadership is not consistent. The school has established good opportunities for staff to voluntarily contribute to a range of working parties which are beginning to have an impact on the school's work, for example on the quality

of teaching and learning and the promotion of the school's ethos. Staff who are involved in these appreciate that their views are valued and they are making a positive contribution to improvement. The governors are good supporters of Highfields but are insufficiently informed on a regular basis about the progress of students, as they work their way through school. Also, they are not fully able to strengthen their ability to monitor the work of departments with which they are linked. Self-evaluation is good and particularly so at the most senior levels of the school. The school's capacity to improve is good: building upon previous carefully planned actions it has an appropriate agenda to promote its strengths and tackle its weaknesses. Highfields has improved since the last inspection and through the incremental changes which are being introduced the momentum for change is gaining impetus and enriches the learning of students.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students' achievement is satisfactory and they reach above average standards. However, there are wide variations in the progress students make in individual subjects. Students' personal development is good and they develop into mature young adults. For example, they readily take responsibility for helping younger students with their studies. Their good research and presentation skills prepare them well for their future. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Well-qualified staff make lessons engaging and students are keen to learn. Teachers provide students with clear feedback that ensures they know what they need to do to improve their work. In the best lessons, progress is accelerated because students are actively involved in their learning. For example, in an English literature lesson where students were independently analysing a set text, the teacher set demanding time limits and questions to challenge, guide and encourage students. This is not a consistent picture and in a minority of lessons students make slow progress when the teacher dominates discussions, thereby making learning too passive. A good range of academic and vocational courses is taught. There are many popular sports and other clubs, for example in Mandarin, that extend students' skills and raise aspirations. The curriculum supports many aspects of students' personal development well but not all students participate in physical education lessons as part of their healthy lifestyle development. Staff use their detailed knowledge of students well to provide them with a good standard of pastoral care. However, tutor time is not always used effectively to support students' academic and personal development. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Students' progress is regularly checked and, if it slows, there are effective procedures to help them catch up. However, while the school sets its students academic targets, these are not consistently challenging enough to ensure progress is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Ensure that all lessons cater well for the needs of different students.
- Improve the use of assessment, reporting and recording so that prompt action can be taken when underperformance becomes evident and the impact of actions undertaken are subsequently evaluated.
- Increase the accountability of middle managers by ensuring greater consistency of monitoring and evaluation.

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

The proportions of students who reach the expected level of attainment in Key Stage 3 and conclude Year 11 with five or more higher grade GCSEs are above the national average. In the case of the latter, results have been improving for the last three years. Action has been taken to improve the achievement of lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities whose progress is slower. Inspection evidence indicates that students who are taking fewer GCSEs overall in order to focus their efforts are benefiting from the support they are receiving. Additionally, curriculum innovations such as the introduction of a horticultural course are better meeting these students' interests and resulting in better overall attainment. The school sets challenging targets particularly for increasing the proportions of students who attain five or more higher GCSE grades.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy their education and speak enthusiastically about the range of opportunities and activities on offer. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and there are many opportunities for individual reflection and appreciation of the views of others. Students have a good sense of right and wrong and speak with assurance and confidence about their school experiences. Their involvement in the life of the performing arts college offers possibilities to broaden horizons and helps students to appreciate the diversity of culture in Britain and other parts of the world. Behaviour around the school is impressive and in lessons attitudes to learning are good. Students are keen to support one another and many older students mentor younger ones or act as sports leaders. Students feel very safe in school. Anti-bullying strategies are effective and students and parents confirm that any concerns are promptly dealt with. Recent surveys provided positive feedback about the health of students and the school has acted on the few issues raised. The school council is effective in introducing improvements. For example they were consulted extensively about the sensitive issue of installing CCTV, and members felt that their views are taken seriously. Good workplace skills are developed as students move through the school. Attendance is above average and is carefully monitored through a range of strategies. Swift action is taken where attendance falls short and good attendance is regularly rewarded.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with examples of good or better practice and there are many signs of improvement. Teachers have good specialist subject knowledge and in the best lessons clear learning objectives are set. Students are articulate and confident and, particularly in the sixth form, able to engage in high level intellectual discussion with their teachers when they are given the opportunity to do so. There are strong working relationships between students, teachers and teaching assistants and behaviour in lessons is

generally good. The best teaching also sees tasks and activities well matched to students' needs and abilities but this good practice is not yet evident in all lessons.

Students are set targets regularly but significant numbers are neither aware of the level at which they are working nor what to do to improve and meet target grades. In the best lessons, strategies such as peer and self-assessment and reviews of learning at the end of lessons are promoting greater awareness amongst students of their current performance and what they could do better. The quality of homework is improving, and there are many instances of good practice, but provision is not yet consistent nor is it consistently marked to provide clear indicators of what needs to be done to improve. Teaching assistants are generally used efficiently to promote good learning in the subjects to which they are affiliated.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The students benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. This is being adjusted constantly to take better account of the needs of individual students. The introduction of vocational courses leading to qualifications for students in Years 10 to 13 is raising aspirations. The school works very well with other providers including local colleges and local businesses to enhance work-related learning and provide good community placements. The students are also well prepared for the world of work through a good programme of personal, social and health education and very good career guidance, together with a firm preparation for future economic well-being. There is also a good focus on developing enterprise skills in the sixth form which is being extended to other age groups by the appointment of an Enterprise Leader to the school. There are many opportunities for varied enrichment activities such as a visit to York University during which former students of the school work with the school group as they participate in a range of learning activities which extend their scientific knowledge and skills. The school has made a significant investment in information and communication technology so that it can be readily used in different subjects throughout the school as a learning tool. The school's specialist status is improving links with the local community, for example through very good support for dance and music in local primary schools. The school provides a wide range of sport and other extra-curricular activities in which many students participate.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Child protection arrangements are well established and safeguarding procedures meet requirements. Parents appreciate the care provided by the pastoral teams and speak of their approachability and effectiveness. Improved provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities offers personalised learning pathways which support students who are struggling. However, good practice in planning work to meet the needs of lower attaining students is not applied consistently by all teachers, which limits the progress students make. Effective and well-planned links with primary schools ensure that students settle quickly into their new school and the well-established transition activities allow students to move smoothly onto their next stage of education. The structured tutorial programme enhances learning and students are well prepared and informed about the world of work and future academic options. Careers advice and guidance on future pathways and option choices which are available from a range of sources is helpful and appreciated by all students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher is seen by staff, students and parents to be approachable, enthusiastic and proactive in his interest in every aspect of the school's work. He has made astute appointments and drawn well upon the skills of staff who are well established at the school. Recognition of the need for better tracking and monitoring of students' performance and for measurement of the impact of interventions put in place has led to the imminent introduction of a new assessment, recording and reporting policy. In addition, the school has rightly identified the need for a greater consistency in how well middle managers monitor and evaluate in different subjects and year groups. Governors are aware of the results achieved by students and are on a journey towards having a more practical and continuous role with departments. Teachers are suitably qualified and experienced. The contribution of working parties to school improvement is to be commended in beginning to bring about a climate of sharing of good practice and valuing individual contributions by staff at all stages in their teaching careers. The quality of the accommodation continues to be a concern. The numbers of part-time staff along with the constraints on the timetable due to the split site mean that continuity between staff who teach specific groups can be problematic.

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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 |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|

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 | 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 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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

Leadership and management

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 | |
| 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**

27 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Highfields School, Matlock, DE4 5NA

Thank you for welcoming me and the inspection team into your school. An inspection is never easy for you or the adults who work with you and so we appreciated your readiness to talk to us and to help us when we got lost. Your views and the opinions of your families have helped us to understand what Highfields is like.

We were impressed with the difference that becoming a performing arts school has made to your education. Chances for you to work with 'Drum Blondes' or consider difficult topics such as Islamophobia through discussing a performance of the play 'Isolating Sharifa' are of great benefit to you. Your school also works hard to give you opportunities to develop your understanding of international communities and different cultures, such as through the links with the Shanghai Music Conservatory and the teaching assistant who helps you to learn Mandarin Chinese so that you can communicate with people on the other side of the world. You are also building strong links locally which are helping you to develop your learning experiences. These include the study of horticulture where you have been helped by parents and teaching assistants.

Your behaviour is good. You take good care of one another and the two sites on which you learn. Many of you, an increasing number of you, attain five or more good grades at the end of Year 11 which sets you up well for the next stage of your education, employment and training. However, not all of you are making the progress you are capable of and we have made a few recommendations for your school to consider in order to improve further.

- Raise the achievement of lower attaining students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Ensure that lessons better cater for the needs of different students.
- Improve assessment, reporting and recording and increase the role of heads of subjects and years to make sure you are always making the best possible progress

Thank you again for making our inspection so enjoyable and rewarding.

Yours sincerely

David Simpson HMI