

Notley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115227
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326154
Inspection date	5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Gask
Headteacher	Mr Simon Thompson
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Notley Road Braintree Essex CM7 1WY
Telephone number	01376556300
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: standards and achievement, the personal development of the students and the quality of teaching and learning. Evidence was gathered from the school's data, students' work, lesson observations, meetings with school staff and students, the senior leadership team and governors.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but 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

Significantly larger than average, Notley High School is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive. The pupils' social and economic backgrounds and their attainment on entry are generally average. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is a quarter of the national average but on a rising trend. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is a fifth of the national figure and the proportion of those whose first language is not English is very low. The proportion of pupils registered by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average; however, the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is above average because the local authority maintains a specialist speech and language centre on the school site. There are a small number of looked after children in the school.

The school was granted specialist technology status in 2001 and as a high performing specialist school, it was granted a second specialism in applied learning in 2006. The school has also received the following national accreditations: Sportsmark, International School Award, Advanced Healthy Schools Award and Artsmark Silver. In October 2008, the school was awarded International Baccalaureate World School status and authorised to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme from September 2009. The Department for Children, Schools and Families has given permission for the school to open a new sixth form centre. Advanced level courses will begin in September 2009.

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. All aspects of the school's provision are at least good and there are many outstanding features, not least the behaviour of the students and the range of curriculum opportunities provided. However, key to this judgement is the inclusive, community focused manner in which senior staff and governors have accepted the invitation from the Department for Children, Schools and Families and are proceeding with the new Braintree Sixth Form centre. Governors and senior staff are currently commissioning this new facility, which is due to open for the first time in September 2009. The school has reached agreement with the three other local secondary schools and other post-16 education providers to open this new facility as Braintree Sixth Form. In doing so, governors and senior staff have acted in the true spirit of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda and enhanced the educational opportunities of every secondary age student in Braintree.

Overall, standards and achievement are good. The 2008 GCSE results are above the national figures on all measures and the proportion of students who obtained the national benchmark five A* to C grades, that include English and mathematics, at 56%, was above the national average. The numbers of students performing well in mathematics, a key area within the school's specialism, is rising significantly. In 2008, the school was particularly pleased with the results in art and design, business and communication systems, history, and religious education. Outcomes in English have been a consistent strength for some years. The results secured by students from minority ethnic backgrounds were in line with or above the national average.

The personal development of the students is good and the maturity of their response to academic questioning, or to any congestion in the very popular canteen, does them credit. Behaviour is outstanding both in and around the school. For example, the lunchtime Year 7 mixed basketball competition and the fervent support it attracted, from a substantial audience, was a credit to all involved. The students' attitudes to learning are very positive; they work well in small groups, listen to their peers' questions and responses and offer thoughtful contributions to the focus of the lesson. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good; for example, Year 8 pupils drew clear moral parallels from an investigation of the Islamic Pillars of Faith.

The school's promotion of community cohesion would be good in any other circumstances, with pastoral teams and subject departments taking effective action to engage with communities from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. However, effective analysis of the school's context, including cultural and socio-economic factors, has led to decisive action to enhance post-16 education and therefore the future economic well-being of all 16-19 learners in the town. The school's contribution to community cohesion is therefore exemplary.

The care, guidance and support the students receive are good and they speak with great affection of the quality of pastoral care, which is a significant strength. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. The school has recently reviewed its policies on marking and assessment as part of its ongoing work on Assessment for Learning. Inspectors found that this new marking and assessment policy was not consistently applied across the whole school. Although examples of high quality marking and academic guidance were seen in a number of departments, not all students were clear about the next steps they need to make in their own learning.

The impact of the school's technology and applied learning specialisms is evident in the improvement in mathematics outcomes, the very good computer facilities around the school and the deployment of modern teaching resources across the curriculum. The tangible investment in staffing and resources, resulting from the award of high performing specialist school status, has enhanced the school's capacity and confidence to raise standards, meet the curriculum demands of the new century and support, through its outreach work, other local schools.

The quality of teaching and learning is good with some outstanding practice seen during this inspection in English, art and design, mathematics and French. In the best lessons, expectations are high, instructions are very clear and tasks enable teachers to provide good opportunities for students to learn in a variety of ways. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is good with a strong focus on lesson planning. Members of the senior management team were invited to accompany inspectors in the joint observation of teaching. The detailed analysis of teaching highlighted areas where greater emphasis needs to be placed on the quality of learning. The forthcoming transition to the provision of post-16 education will require the further development of students' independent learning skills.

Overall, curriculum provision is outstanding, not just because of the range of provision available but as a result of the very personal curriculum choices the school facilitates in Years 10 and 11. The range of extra-curricular opportunities and additional academic support provided is exceptional. Healthy lifestyles are the norm; the level of sporting participation and of competitive success is high and the quality of school catering was particularly impressive, winning very positive comments from the students.

Although the school is investing its own money in a new sports hall, the external playing fields are often waterlogged; the new sixth form provision will significantly increase the level of demand upon sports facilities. The new sixth form centre is already oversubscribed before it opens. Senior leaders and governors recognise the need to address these key resource issues with the local authority.

Leadership and management are outstanding; they are good in all major respects and are exemplary in the inclusive approach to post-16 educational opportunities being developed by the school. Leaders and managers at every level provide clear direction. The school's financial resources are effectively managed; value for money is good. Capacity to improve is good.

Governance is good; the care and attention governors have brought to the whole process of growing a new sixth form is commendable. The school has developed an outstanding vision for the future of post-16 education in Braintree and has worked very effectively with its partner schools to promote this vision and take the necessary steps to establish the Braintree Sixth Form from September 2009. While this development is an example of outstanding community cohesion, work with its partners to establish more formal admissions and governance arrangements is not yet fully developed; federal or trust arrangements will be required to allow equality of access to the new sixth form for all who attend the partner establishments.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the school's assessment and marking policies are consistently applied.
- Establish appropriate governance and admission arrangements to ensure the success and viability of the Braintree Sixth Form partnership.
- Focus staff professional development and the monitoring of teaching on enhancing the quality of learning.

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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?	1
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	2
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	2
The behaviour of learners	1
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?	1
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?	1
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	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
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**

6 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Notley High School, Braintree, CM71WY

It is a pleasure to take this opportunity to tell you how impressed the inspectors were with your school, your attitude to learning and your behaviour around the school. Inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of your school to be outstanding.

You were keen to tell us how good the pastoral care was in the school but also noted that the marking of your work could be more consistent. The school provides you with an outstanding range of curricular opportunities. The range of clubs and support groups and sporting activities is extensive. Teaching and learning is good and inspectors saw a number of examples of outstanding practice, where there was a strong focus on the quality of learning. I have asked the school to develop this practice as widely as possible.

The governors and senior staff have worked hard to secure the brand new sixth form facilities you see being built. The school has developed a partnership with the other schools in the town to develop this as Braintree Sixth Form, a development that will improve the educational opportunities for every young person in town. I have asked the governing body to put this partnership on a more formal basis to secure the admission arrangements required.

It was a pleasure to meet so many of you in the brief time I was in the school and I look forward to hearing of your future success.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector