

Queen Elizabeth High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116930
Local Authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	326492
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright 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)	311
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Gibbs
Headteacher	Michael Goodman
Date of previous school inspection	11 May 2006
School address	Ashfields Bromyard HR7 4QS
Telephone number	01885 482230
Fax number	01885 483935

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most secondary schools. There are lower than national proportions of students eligible for free school meals, and other socio-economic indicators are average, but this hides the reality of a wide range of circumstances, including some rural disadvantage. Almost all students are from a White British background. Although the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is average, nearly half the students are on the special educational needs register, which is well above the national average. The previous headteacher left the school after three years of service at the end of 2008, and there is an acting headteacher in place for two terms, who has been a senior leader at the school for many years. The school gained Humanities College status in the summer of 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Queen Elizabeth Humanities College is providing a sound education, where students of all abilities and backgrounds make the expected progress. Academic standards have risen from below average three years ago, to broadly in line with national averages in the 2008 examination results. This improvement is a consequence of securely satisfactory teaching, a good curriculum, and effective care and support of all students by committed, close-knit and friendly staff. Students enjoy their time at school and most parents are pleased with the quality of education their children are receiving. The school is a safe place to learn, with healthy food and exercise enjoyed by most students.

Attendance, however, is below average, particularly when compared with schools in similar settings. Despite the efforts by the school, attendance continues to decline. The school has not yet developed effective strategies that address the needs of those students who are persistently absent from school.

The curriculum at Key Stage 4 has improved in recent years, and is particularly good given the relatively small size of the school. It means students can follow both academic and vocational pathways, and have opportunities for early GCSE entry and access to advanced level studies. Much of the drive for this curriculum enrichment has come from the Humanities College initiative; this has catalysed a very strong engagement with the local community that is already working ahead of its targets. Students benefit from many opportunities to work with their local community. As a result, they are making a great contribution to community cohesion and many local organisations and community representatives have provided strong positive testament to the impact of the school in their work. As one participant said, this initiative 'has brought this school to life'.

Inspectors agree with the school's own observations that teaching and learning are satisfactory, with many lessons that are good; the best lessons engage students in active learning, for example using drama in science, or pattern matching in mathematics. There are good-humoured relationships between teachers and students, leading to a positive working ethos in lessons. Much of the day-to-day marking is good, with teachers accurately identifying what needs to improve, but there were very few examples of students responding to that advice. However, inspectors also saw a small number of examples of very poor presentation, and of cursory marking. The majority of lessons took some account of the range of abilities of students. However, many teachers set all students the same task, sometimes with extra work for the more able, rather than assigning more challenging work at the outset of the lesson to those students.

Leadership and management are satisfactory, and the school has demonstrated a good capacity to improve in recent years. The acting headteacher is successfully maintaining these improvements. Prudent financial management has ensured a steady programme of refurbishment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve attendance by ensuring all possible strategies to support persistent absentees are in place.
- Ensure written feedback to students on what they need to do to improve is consistently good for all classes, and students have time to respond to this advice.
- Consistently match activities to the prior knowledge, interests and abilities of students.
- Collectively insist on high standards in the presentation of work.

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

Students arrive in Year 7 with broadly average levels of attainment. Standards at the end of Year 11 now match the national average, and have improved from significantly lower than average at the previous inspection. A strong feature in the 2008 results was the proportion of students gaining five higher grades in GCSE examinations that include English and mathematics; this is now slightly higher than the national average. The improvement in English results at Key Stage 4 since the previous inspection has played an important part here. When standards are compared to similar settings nationally, students are making the progress expected and their achievement, including for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is satisfactory. Girls of average ability on entry to the school achieved well. Preliminary information about Key Stage 3 results in 2008 suggests that achievement and standards were satisfactory although slightly lower than the targets set by the school. Standards in 2007 at Key Stage 3, however, were significantly below average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The personal development and well-being of students are satisfactory. Students show good spiritual development, for example in their respectful observance of opportunities for reflection in assemblies. Students demonstrate good social development, as shown by their positive attitudes to their peers and to adults, both in lessons and around the school. They develop a good understanding of the diverse cultures represented in modern Britain and the worldwide community through activities such as developing the 'RE Village'. One benefit of the Humanities College status has been the development of international links with schools in Tanzania and Texas. There are also links with a further eight schools and communities worldwide. The majority of students regularly take part in extra-curricular sporting and other physical activities, and there is a good take-up of healthy food at the canteen. Students say food has become much better in recent years. Students move safely in and around school, and behaviour is always at least satisfactory. Students are not concerned about bullying, and so feel safe: they know what to do if any incidents occur, and are confident that the school will deal with them effectively.

Students say, and most of their parents confirm, that they enjoy coming to school. They make a positive contribution to the school community, for example through the active school council and by raising money for a variety of local and national charities. Some students felt, and inspectors agree, that at times, the school was inconsistent in how it reacted to minor infringements of school rules, for example in dealing with untidy uniform. Although attendance is satisfactory, it is decreasing despite measures that the school has implemented to bring about improvement, such as the text service and rewards. Students' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Senior managers monitor classroom practice accurately, and the inspection confirmed that lessons are at least satisfactory, and many are good. There are good light-hearted working relationships between teachers and students. In the best practice, students were engrossed in interesting activities that matched their abilities well. For example, in a science lesson, groups of students acted out small 'question and answer' sessions as if on a television show, using summary information from the class teacher as a reference guide. Other students learned well from each of these separate examples. Most day-to-day marking is accurate, and teachers are identifying how students can improve the work. However, this comes in the form of a suggestion, rather than an instruction and, as a result, students are not carrying out the advice. There were too many examples where poorly presented work slipped through unchecked. Teachers have a good knowledge of the prior learning of their students, and of any special learning needs. This information is not yet consistently resulting in tasks set in lessons, or for homework, that matches those needs and abilities, although there are examples of excellent practice across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has improved substantially since the previous inspection. Students have a remarkable range of opportunities despite the small size of the school. The Humanities College specialism has driven curriculum development, both in the formal taught programme of subjects leading towards examinations, and the wide range of additional activities beyond the school day. The school is rightly proud of its ability to match the needs and interests of individual learners through courses. About a quarter of the current Year 11 are studying some vocational courses, and this has grown to about half of the current Year 10. Drama and music are very strong and are popular subjects enjoyed by many students. They are supported by strong links with local performing arts societies. There are good collaborative networks with other schools, and also the Aspire technology and engineering centre near Tenbury Wells.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school complies with the current government requirements for safeguarding, and health and safety. The school identifies vulnerable learners and provides the appropriate support or interventions. Previous records showed an inappropriately high number of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The recently appointed special educational needs co-ordinator has quickly established a more realistic and accurate picture of those students with learning needs. Individual education plans are in place and have involved students and parents. There are good links with most outside agencies and parents. Teachers know their students well, as do senior managers, and this high level of care and attention to student welfare is a strength of the school. There are effective links with local counselling services for students and families. Currently, students have a single target grade for their examination subjects, and most know in general terms what aspects of their learning they need to improve. However, the practice of re-testing Year 7 students using Key Stage 2 papers generated a falsely low baseline on which to set student targets; this risked the establishment of institutional low expectations.

The school has successfully tracked student progress and instigated programmes that helped avoid underachievement, at least for those students who maintained satisfactory attendance. Nevertheless, despite the school's introduction of new technology to alert parents, and rewards for students, there remain a significant number of students whose attendance is poor. So far, work to improve lower than average attendance has been ineffective.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and the school has made good progress in raising standards from three years ago; this is despite a period of considerable staff change, including the recent departure of the headteacher to another school after three years of service.

Governance is satisfactory with a businesslike approach to strategic oversight; governors review most key policies on schedule, although there has been no evaluation of their impact. The school has met or exceeded most of its statutory Key Stage 4 targets in 2008, but it undershot most of its Key Stage 3 targets. Attendance, however, is still declining and reflects a lack of urgency in recent years to tackle the problem independently of external agencies. Middle managers are aware of many of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and they are very committed to further improvements. This includes ensuring staff consistently apply school policies in detail, and a corporate focus on challenging low expectations. This has sometimes been evident in the acceptance of poor quality in the standards of presentation of students' work.

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
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
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**

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth Humanities College, Bromyard HR7 4QS

Thank you for your friendly and good-humoured discussions with us during our inspection of your school. We agree with you, your parents and the staff of the school that 'QE' is improving, and is providing you with a sound education. Almost all students last year made the progress expected, given their starting points. There are two particularly strong features of your school worth noting. Firstly, your teachers and support staff know you well, and work very hard to make sure you stay safe, learn well, and get any support you might need. Secondly, the curriculum is rich and varied, both in choice of subjects, and in the range of opportunities to take part in sports, performing arts, and community visits. The recent Humanities College status is making a big difference for the better.

However, the school could make some improvements, and these are the most important areas for their focus. We have asked the school to help improve the low attendance of some students. Teachers usually spot what needs improving in your work, but should be more insistent that you follow their recommendations. You should get into the habit of reading their comments and then acting upon them straight away. Sometimes, your lesson activities and homework could be more closely matched to your talents, or previous knowledge. We agree with you that the school should be more consistent with the way it maintains high standards, such as the presentation of your written work, or niggles over how you wear uniform.

Best wishes for your future,

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright

Her Majesty's Inspector