

Hanley Castle High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116981
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326510
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	915
Sixth form	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Thomas
Headteacher	Rob Haring
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Church End Hanley Castle Worcester WR8 0BL
Telephone number	01684 593241
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is average in size, located in a rural setting 12 miles south of Worcester. The school has existed for over 700 years, retaining many of its original features with the recently built languages block carefully designed to fit into the original character. The majority of students are White British. A small but growing number of students are from minority ethnic and Traveller communities, and there are low numbers for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational needs, is below average.

The school has several achievement awards, for example, International School and Healthy School awards. The school has specialist status in languages and achieved its financial management standard in schools in 2007/08.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hanley Castle High school is a vibrant and dynamic school that has not stood still since the last inspection. The active involvement of the staff, governors and students in all aspects of the life and work of the school is impressive. Staff share a sense of purpose and are highly committed to the school's values and its continued improvement. Students' personal development is exceptionally strong. Students display maturity and take responsibility for the very good behaviour in and around the school. They are always very polite and eager to help, and speak proudly of their school and how staff help them to do well.

Standards overall are now above average, clearly indicating the good and sometimes outstanding progress students make during their time at the school. The proportion of students reaching the expected levels in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 is above the national average. Results in the GCSE examinations have improved steadily since the last inspection despite the decline in 2008 and are now above average. The school offers a good range of curricular opportunities, which are personalised to meet the needs of its students. The broad range of activities within and outside lessons, many reflecting the school's specialist status in modern foreign languages, widen students' horizons, raise their aspirations and improve their achievement. Teaching is good overall, with much that is outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers challenge the students, and opportunities are given for them to discuss their work in ways that develop their thinking. However, in a minority of lessons there are missed opportunities for students to work independently.

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features. The school has gone from strength to strength since the last inspection, and successfully achieved its specialist status in modern foreign languages. The recent developments in mathematics at management level and information and communication technology (ICT) are also impressive. The headteacher's energy and vision for the school drive school improvement and are constantly evolving. He takes every opportunity to ensure that the students in his school get the best there is to offer. The dedicated and skilled senior leadership team, along with the middle leaders, sets a clear direction for the school. The response from staff in turn is enthusiastic and they too work effectively. Consequently, the school has exceptional capacity for continued improvement.

The school monitors and evaluates its work rigorously, particularly through its departmental reviews, which ensure that strengths are identified and any weaknesses addressed swiftly. The school development plan builds on what the school does well, but is also responsive to areas that could be even better. The school knows itself well and continues to strive for excellence in all that it does. It recognises that the provision in the sixth form needs to be broadened in order to raise standards so that they are comparable with those reached in the main school. The school uses the data available to analyse its performance and to pinpoint areas for improvements at all levels. Most of the middle leaders have effectively enhanced their areas of responsibility and continue to strive to improve standards that are already above the national average. They are actively involved in developing the teaching in their subject and willingly share good practice wherever it exists. The school uses its staff and other resources, particularly through its specialist's status, to enhance its work with its local partner primary schools. This is justifiably well regarded by the eight primary schools because of its positive influence on younger children and their experiences in languages.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school has a growing sixth form. Just over half of the Year 11 students continue on to the sixth form. The school operates an open access policy and clear guidance is provided on the limited choice of courses, which is currently being broadened. Standards reached by students by the end of Year 13 are in line with the national average. This represents satisfactory progress from their entry into Year 12. Effective steps have been taken to raise overall achievement and standards and these are evident in the school's own data for 2008. The school uses its own rigorous system to analyse progress and this indicates that satisfactory progress is made.

Students are given detailed information on performance and what they need to do better. Students' attitudes are very positive and their personal development is good. Sixth formers maintain strong links to the main school and contribute to the school community in a wide range of ways, for example supporting younger students in their learning. Relationships between students and staff are good and the large majority of students complete the courses they begin.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The curriculum is sound but the range of courses offered is too narrow to meet the needs of all students. The school recognises this and plans to widen its provision in conjunction with other local providers. The introduction of recent improvements, for example in assessment and tracking progress, show that the sixth form has good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or outstanding by sharing the good practice that exists in developing pupils' independent learning skills.
- Improve the breadth of provision in the sixth form in order to raise standards so that they are comparable with those reached in the main school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly in line with the national average. Although there was a slight decline in 2008, particularly in English, students make good progress. The proportion of students achieving five good GCSE passes, including in English and mathematics, is above average. The school's own performance data leads senior staff to believe that the current Year 9 and Year 11 students are likely to exceed the ambitious targets set by the school for 2009. The school uses its strong systems for tracking individual student progress to effectively support all students, including those that are vulnerable. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with statements of special educational needs do equally as well as their peers. Effective actions have been taken by the school to improve standards in all subjects to match those achieved in modern foreign languages, mathematics and ICT, where achievement is very good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students enjoy school and are proud to be at Hanley Castle. They demonstrate considerate behaviour and cooperate well. Students have positive attitudes to work and are involved in their own learning. Attendance is good and systems are in place to reduce persistent absentees through, for example, the recent

appointment of a family support worker. Students adopt healthy lifestyles and respond well to the comprehensive personal, social and health education programmes. Students feel safe and are safety conscious. The fact that bullying is rare is evidence of the impact of the school council's work on the Bullying Charter. The school seeks the views of its students and the school council is a positive force in driving school improvement. Students participate in a wide range of activities that contribute to the local community from litter picking to raising money for various charities. Incidents of racism are rare and students have a good sense of shared values. Students make good progress in developing the personal qualities and skills required for their future economic well-being. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Their moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, but the school recognises that there is work to be done to further develop students' spiritual understanding.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good and sometimes outstanding quality of teaching and learning contributes to the good progress students make. The arrangements for grouping the students operate flexibly to ensure they receive the teaching appropriate for their needs. Teachers have good subject knowledge and collaborate very well in sharing ideas and good practice, particularly for example in modern foreign languages and English. Behaviour in lessons during the inspection was excellent and students were fully engaged in their learning. In the majority of lessons teachers set appropriate objectives, give clear explanations, set activities suitable to students' capabilities and use effective questioning techniques. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers dominate the lesson and direct students' learning too much which does not help them to develop independent study skills. Students display very positive attitudes to learning and this contributes significantly to an effective climate for learning, enabling students to confidently seek help and contribute ideas to class discussions. Teaching assistants are used well and make a positive contribution to students' learning. Students and parents are well informed about the expected and current levels of achievement through regular reviews. As a result of firm actions taken by the senior leadership team the quality of teaching has improved further, particularly for example, in geography, modern foreign languages, English and ICT. The quality of marking has also significantly improved since the last inspection and students regularly receive useful comments on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum in the main school is well designed to meet the distinctive needs of different groups of students. It has been expanded to meet a wider range of needs and interests, particularly vocational pathways. All statutory requirements are met. Specialist status has enabled the school to both enhance and extend its curriculum. It is having a significant impact on the number of students taking languages and the range of courses offered, with an increasing number taking two languages at Key Stage 4 and opting to follow language courses in the sixth form. The school recognises that it needs to broaden the 14 to 19 curriculum, particularly the vocational courses provision.

The curriculum promotes students' moral, social and cultural development very well through its well-planned course on personal, social and health education as well as the course on

citizenship and global studies. The numerous extra-curricular activities, for example sports, art, music, drama and other specialist interest clubs, further enhance and broaden students' experiences.

The curriculum supports students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities well and learning support assistants ensure they can participate effectively in all activities. All students in Year 10 and Year 12 participate in work experience and there are good additional work-related learning experiences arranged for those following vocational options.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There are rigorous procedures to ensure pupils' safety and security. Excellent relationships between students and adults mean that students feel secure and confident and that there is always someone to turn to if they need any help. The school provides excellent care for its students. It achieves this by the attention it gives, in equal measures, to students' academic and pastoral needs. Academic guidance is now very strong. Students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to achieve them. Many know at which National Curriculum level they are working and what that means. Staff know their students well because of the school's emphasis on building a strong inclusive ethos. Students' personal and academic development is monitored closely and prompt action is taken when and if any difficulties occur. Parents are overwhelmingly positive and appreciate the care the school gives to their children. Parents also feel very well informed about their progress. Vulnerable students, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or statements of special educational needs, are particularly well supported and monitored so that they have the opportunity to achieve as well as they can.

Good guidance is provided on options choices in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, although the narrow curriculum in the sixth form means that the school cannot effectively meet the needs or interests of some post-16 students. Individual learning programmes are being devised for students when needed. The school works hard to raise the aspirations of its students and, in particular, to promote the advantages of further and higher education to both students and their parents.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good; there are elements that are outstanding. The headteacher's outstanding leadership and management of the school have led it on a journey of improvement since its last inspection. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school with a passionate belief in inclusion. All students are valued, and those with particular needs are nurtured well. The strong and effective senior leadership team, the governing body and all staff share this vision. This is consistently recognised by parents and students who appreciate the very strong and positive school ethos that promotes academic success and personal and social development in all students. Additional resources, secured through its specialist status, have provided the opportunity to accelerate the pace of improvement. Effective support for feeder primary schools has developed via the specialism and senior staff used the citizenship and global studies courses effectively to promote good community cohesion. The school regularly reflects on its practice and has an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development.

The monitoring of teaching is regular and accurate. Strategies to eradicate any weaknesses in teaching have been effective.

The quality of middle leadership varies but overall is good and has driven improvement in many subjects. Subject self-evaluations inform not only developments in their own subjects but also the whole school. This is particularly evident in modern foreign languages, English, mathematics and ICT.

The governing body has a good knowledge and understanding of the school and what needs to improve to make it even better. They offer challenge and support, and ensure that the school meets all statutory requirements. Performance management at all levels is good, and used effectively to support the development of the whole school. The school continues to work hard to further improve its links with the local community, not being daunted by its geographical location.

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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?	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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	2	
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	2	

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?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

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	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	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 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Hanley Castle High School, Church End, Worcestershire, WR8 0BL

Thank you for very much for being so welcoming during our recent visit to your school. During the visit, many of you told us that you are very proud and pleased to be students at Hanley Castle High School and that you are particularly pleased with the new languages building.

All the adults working in your school provide outstanding opportunities for your personal and social development as well as providing excellent care, guidance and support. Mr Haring is one of the reasons your school is good and improving. He is absolutely committed to the school and is very determined to keep making Hanley Castle High School even better. For example, the recently built languages building has helped to broaden your experience by giving you the opportunity to study a number of languages. You are also able to go to other countries to help you broaden your outlook on life.

We think you and your teachers work hard and the standard of your work is improving all the time. We would like all of your lessons to be as exciting and full of interesting activities and independent learning as the many good and outstanding lessons that we saw during our visit. The school knows that the sixth form could be better and we agree. We have asked the school to improve the sixth form and give you greater choices in the courses available so that more of you are able to stay on.

- Thank you for the help that you gave us during our inspection visit. We really enjoyed meeting you in lessons and on the playground, but also at lunchtime. We would particularly like to thank the school council for giving up their lunchtime to speak with us. We were impressed with the contribution you make to the school. Would you thank your parents, too, for the support that they give the school and for the good response that they gave to our inspection questionnaire

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Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif

Her Majesty's Inspector