

The Hertfordshire and Essex High School and Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117592
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326656
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Paula Heaney 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	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1036
Sixth form	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Redfern
Headteacher	Ms A Garner
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	Warwick Road Bishop's Stortford Hertfordshire CM23 5NJ
Telephone number	01279 654127
Fax number	01279 508810

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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 Hertfordshire and Essex High School and Science College is an over-subscribed, comprehensive foundation school for girls providing education for students aged 11 to 18, with a science and mathematics specialism. Although standards on entry to the school are above the national average overall the school recruits a very small minority of students with prior attainment that is below. The school population is predominantly White British (94.8%). The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Attendance is above the national average. The school has the Healthy Schools Award, the Sportsmark, the ICT Mark, the International School Award and was designated a leadership partner school in 2008. At sixth form level the school competes with other providers, with a significant number choosing to study at sixth form colleges in Cambridge. Students from other local schools join the sixth form, including a small proportion of boys.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Hertfordshire and Essex High School is an outstanding school with an outstanding sixth form; students' achievements are excellent due to the high standard of teaching and learning, the very effective monitoring of progress and the high quality support they receive to ensure each individual achieves their potential. Parents are highly supportive of the school, with one parent typifying the comments made by many. 'The total wellbeing of each student is always the priority. Each student is given enough freedom and respect to develop their individual talents, discovering themselves and developing into mature, responsible, educated young adults.'

Standards are excellent in the main school and good in the sixth form, with a significant improvement in the proportion of students gaining five good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, to well above national averages. The school's specialism contributes significantly, as standards in mathematics and science are high and activities to promote and develop knowledge and creativity in these subjects are very well supported. A large majority of lessons are very well planned, with activities which meet individuals' needs and stretch the most able. Students are closely involved in the monitoring of their progress and are very clear what they need to do to achieve or exceed their targets. Thorough and regular monitoring by staff ensures most students achieve their goals. The curriculum range is very good, enhanced by close links with local schools and a further education college. Participation in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities is excellent.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding and behaviour is excellent in and around the school. Students speak highly of the school and are very enthusiastic about the support they receive. They feel safe and secure, adopt healthy lifestyles and develop very good skills for their future economic well-being. Care, guidance and support are excellent and students are very well prepared for the next stage in their lives. Those who stay on in the sixth form are very successful with a high proportion progressing to higher education.

Leadership and management are outstanding and focused sharply on further improvements at all levels. Challenging targets are set and most are achieved, including those for the school's specialisms. The school makes a very good contribution to community cohesion. The leadership team and governors work very successfully to create an inclusive school community, particularly in the sixth form. All students feel equally valued and achieve very well.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

A large majority of students who stay on into the sixth form, or enter from other schools, have prior attainment that is broadly in line with the entry criteria. Standards are good, with most students achieving above average grades in 2008 in their GCE A level examinations.

Consequently, the progress they make relative to their starting points is outstanding overall. A high proportion of students progress to higher education, with nearly one in five accepted by the 20 major research-intensive universities. Most students meet very challenging targets and retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are very good, due to the excellent support and guidance they receive.

Teaching and learning are outstanding overall and assessments indicate very clearly what students need to do to improve. The curriculum is very extensive, enhanced further by an effective partnership arrangement with other local schools. Students display highly positive

attitudes and develop very good independent learning skills. Personal development is outstanding with excellent opportunities for developing future economic well-being. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding and focused strongly on continued improvement across the subjects.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no significant areas for improvement in the school or sixth form. The school's management action plan already identifies appropriate measures for ongoing success.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

By the end of Year 9, the results in national tests are significantly above the national average, particularly at the higher levels of attainment. This is the result of the excellent progress students make which continues into Years 10 and 11. Strategies to improve progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11, have been very successful. Standards in Year 11 are rising, following a decline identified at the last inspection. Almost all students gain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE and the proportion of students in Year 11 achieving five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, is significantly above the national average for girls, 83% in 2008. Performance in most subjects is well above average as is the proportion of students achieving top grades. Results in science and mathematics, the school's specialisms, are very high with around a third of students gaining top grades. Throughout the school, students with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress due to close monitoring and support. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve equally as well as their peers. Most students achieve their targets, which are appropriately challenging and encourage students to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students develop into confident and mature young people during their time at the school. They are reflective and thoughtful when giving their views, listening with interest to what others have to say. Students empathise readily with others, often showing a level of courtesy and sensitivity that is beyond their years. Their understanding of cultural diversity is very well developed and they are keen to learn about other cultures and religions. Excellent behaviour instils a strong sense of safety and students themselves make a strong contribution to the friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Students' outstanding enjoyment of school is very evident in their lively engagement during lessons and their participation in all that it has to offer. An excellent attendance record reflects their highly positive attitudes to school. Through the school council and a wide variety of activities such as leading assemblies, raising funds for good causes and reading to primary school children, students make an excellent contribution to the school and wider community. Students choose healthy options and take regular exercise readily. In their interactions with one another, students show highly developed interpersonal and teamwork skills which, coupled with their excellent progress in literacy and numeracy, prepare them exceptionally well for the next step in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

A culture of learning permeates the school for both teachers and students, which promotes achievement. Teachers know their students very well and develop positive relationships while maintaining high expectations. In the most successful lessons, teachers use their enthusiasm, good subject knowledge and thorough understanding of learning strategies to plan and deliver highly engaging lessons. They design opportunities for students to develop their capacity to work individually and in groups. Very effective questioning is used not only to check understanding but to extend students' thinking skills, developing independence in the way they learn. Assessment is varied and often involves self, peer and teacher feedback which enables a clearer understanding of what students need to do to improve further. Relationships between staff and students are excellent.

In a very small number of lessons the expectations are lower and activities designed do not fully involve students. Challenge is lacking and pace is slow resulting in only satisfactory progress. The school has very clear and effective strategies for monitoring and developing teaching. Teachers review and reflect upon their practice and this continues to have a positive impact on improving the quality of student learning and achievement across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum reflects the strong inclusive ethos of the school as it involves both parents and students in evolving the provision very successfully. It meets the needs of all students extremely well and focuses not only on academic progress but on developing the individual as a whole. The school's specialism of science and mathematics contributes enormously to extending and enriching student learning, through activities with schools as far afield as China and Uganda to develop creativity in science and technology.

Students really enjoy the curriculum which is enriched by many visitors, trips, an extensive range of clubs and themed weeks organised as part of the school specialism. The school's preparation of students for the world of work is excellent. The needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities are met very well through early identification and good support both in class and through personalised programmes. Plans are in place to move towards a shortened Key Stage 3 curriculum to provide a more personalised curriculum for individuals and extend the subject range further.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school goes out of its way to ensure that students are very well cared for and looked after. The strong support for personal development and the use of a wide range of external professional staff ensure that individual needs are met very well. Individual action plans for students involve them actively and closely, with supporting notes that provide excellent guidance for staff and students on strategies for addressing learning needs. Good attention is paid to health and safety and all safeguarding requirements are met. Students are confident that staff will help them should they have any problems. Parents are very positive about the school and what it offers their children.

Academic guidance is excellent. Consequently, students have a very clear idea of the progress they are making, the levels at which they are working and what they need to do to improve their work. They also know their targets because staff constantly discuss these with students and both model and provide exemplars for them to follow.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is supported by the senior management team very effectively. Together with middle managers, the team takes forward all major areas of development and has raised standards and achievement very successfully beyond targets set. Strategies to improve teaching and learning focus on raising the proportion of lessons judged to be good or better successfully. Staff share an established sense of common purpose and culture of high expectations. Self-evaluation is excellent and identifies strengths and areas for further improvement very clearly. Staff feel fully supported and are enthusiastic about the openness and support practised by all levels of management. Governors are very well informed and have an excellent understanding of the strengths and the areas for improvement of the school. They are active participants in the life of the school and support the school very effectively. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the school's progress integrate governors with the senior leadership team thoroughly.

Highly effective and established links exist with other schools in the locality and the school has an excellent reputation in the area. The school's status as a leadership partner school has engendered a leadership culture throughout the whole school community very successfully, enhancing leadership skills for staff and students. As a result, the leadership and management provide the school with excellent capacity to improve further.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Hertfordshire and Essex High School and Science College, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 5NJ

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. First, I would like to thank you for your openness, friendliness and courtesy during our visit. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions.

The inspection found that yours is an outstanding school with an outstanding sixth form. It is very well led and managed. Standards are high and you make excellent progress overall in the main school. In the sixth form, standards are good overall, and you make excellent progress when compared with your entry qualifications. Throughout the school your teachers and other staff are supporting you extremely well to get you to achieve to the best of your ability. Your behaviour is excellent overall as is your attendance.

As we have not identified any significant areas for improvement, we have asked the school to continue with the work already identified in its action plans to ensure ongoing success.

We wish you well with your future studies.

Best wishes

Paula Heaney

Her Majesty's Inspector