

Holbrook High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124848
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328231
Inspection date	4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Jennifer Brown 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	491
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Susan Arnold
Headteacher	Mr Robert Sherington
Date of previous school inspection	11 January 2006
School address	Ipswich Road Holbrook IP9 2QX
Telephone number	01473328317
Fax number	01473327362

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- standards and achievement in 2008
- the robustness of the school's monitoring and evaluation processes and their impact on improving standards and achievement
- the quality of the curriculum.

Evidence was gathered from a number of sources including interviews with pupils, staff and the Chair of governors, lesson observations, examination of pupils' work and school documents. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but no evidence was found to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included when appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Holbrook is a smaller than average secondary school in rural Suffolk. It obtained specialist status for humanities and modern foreign languages in September 2006. Almost all pupils are of White British background and very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is well below average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is similar to that found nationally, the largest groups having specific learning difficulties or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is twice the national average. The school is in a 14 to 19 partnership with six other high schools, three special schools and two further education colleges to establish a new sixth form centre, South West Suffolk and South Suffolk Sixth Form Centre, due to open in 2010. The school was recognised as an Eco School in 2007 and achieved Sportsmark Status in 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Holbrook High School is a good and improving school. It provides a good standard of education for its pupils and helps them to develop into mature, confident and articulate young adults. Since the last inspection, the school has gained specialist status in humanities and languages. This has had a positive effect on standards, which have continued to rise, and on the quality of the curriculum, which is now good. Leadership and management are good. Pupils receive good care and support from staff and are well taught. The school has a good reputation locally and parents hold it in high regard.

Achievement and standards are good. Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is broadly average. The standards they attain by the end of Key Stage 3 have consistently been well above average. The proportion of pupils attaining five or more higher grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, is well above average, although there is some variation in standards across different subjects. Standards within the school's specialist areas are high in French and history, but performance in English literature is not as good. Pupils usually make good progress while they are at the school, although it is better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. The progress made by pupils who left the school in 2008 was not as good as in other years. This is because, for this year group, the achievement of boys was satisfactory rather than good. The school knows its pupils well, tracks and monitors their progress closely and has refined its systems for doing so. Current data, provided by the school, indicates that GCSE standards will continue to rise over the next two years and pupils are making good progress.

The school has given careful thought to the ways in which the curriculum can effectively serve the majority of its learners. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is broader than at the time of the last inspection, because of the school's specialist status and the introduction of a range of vocational courses offered through partnership arrangements with two other high schools and a training provider. It is playing an active role in the development of the new South West Suffolk and South Suffolk Sixth Form Centre, due to open in 2010. This will ensure that pupils have good access to the new diplomas and other local post-16 provision. Links made with schools in Beck in Germany and Shanghai in China are providing language and cultural enrichment for pupils. Statutory requirements are now met in religious education and information and communication technology, and improvements in enterprise education prepare pupils well for their future economic well-being. Pupils appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer in sport, drama, languages, motor vehicle maintenance and study support, and their participation in them is good.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and convey an enthusiasm for their subjects that leads to good pupil engagement in learning. When used effectively, interactive whiteboards enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment. Behaviour in lessons is good overall, although pupils and parents report some low-level disruption in lessons, where there have been some temporary staff changes beyond the control of the school. Pupils at Key Stage 3 understand the role of the 'Passport to Learning' process in developing their research, project planning and independent learning skills. The school has listened to parents' and pupil concerns about workload during the autumn term and made appropriate changes in arrangements. Pupils are provided with opportunities to work independently in lessons, but the frequency with which this occurs is variable. Teachers regularly assess pupils' work. Pupils report they feel well informed about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, through oral and written feedback. However, teachers are not consistently using

assessment data when planning lessons to ensure that they challenge and meet the needs of all pupils and maximise the progress they make.

Parents value the caring ethos of the school and the good quality of care, guidance and support provided. Many took the opportunity during the inspection to praise the high quality of support their children had received. One parent encapsulated their views by saying, 'Holbrook High's staff and thoughts are for the pupils' well-being, both in their educational needs and welfare.' Pupils in Year 7, or who are new to the school, quickly settle in and make new friends. There are good links with local special schools, who work with the school to provide extra support for pupils who find learning difficult. Pupils whose behaviour puts them at risk of exclusion are well supported through the 'Pit Stop' facility, and consequently, exclusion rates are below the Suffolk average. Attendance is good and improving because of effective liaison between administrative staff, heads of year and the education welfare service. Recently revised systems to identify pupils who are underachieving and to target them for extra help are working well, but it is too early to judge their impact on raising pupil achievement. The school has taken a number of steps to improve the quality of marking since the last inspection. However, it is aware that marking remains variable.

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy coming to school, behave well and have good attitudes to learning. They feel safe and are concerned for the safety and welfare of others. The school council has recently conducted a survey to determine how safe pupils feel in different parts of the school and are currently deciding what action to take to address their findings. Most pupils know how to lead healthy lifestyles and are very positive about the facilities available to them since the new sports centre opened in January 2007. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils of all ages make a good contribution to the school and wider community through mentoring, voluntary work and fund-raising for charities. Tolerance and respect for other people's values and beliefs are strong features of the school. The school's curriculum is used effectively to increase pupils' understanding of their peers from different religious and cultural backgrounds, but there are more limited opportunities for them to engage directly with pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, provides a clear direction for the school. Since the last inspection, standards at the end of Year 11 and the quality of the curriculum have continued to improve, demonstrating that the school has a good capacity to improve further. The school has largely been successful in achieving the challenging targets it has set itself for improving pupils' achievement. The introduction of a refined system for tracking pupils' progress, called 'Praising Stars,' has increased managers' capacity to monitor and evaluate progress. Information about achievement is rapidly available to pupils, parents and staff six times a year, enabling good progress to be recognised and praised and underachievement to be targeted at departmental or school level. Senior managers recognise that the evaluation of the impact of teachers' interventions to improve pupil achievement and well-being is not sufficiently robust. Governors exercise their role well and challenge poor performance effectively. They are fully involved in evaluating the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Joint planning with other local providers of education and training, as well as links with schools overseas, reflect the commitment of the school to community cohesion.

What the school should do to improve further

- Identify and make effective use of clear success criteria for evaluating the impact of interventions on improving pupils' standards, achievement and well-being.

- Ensure teachers consistently use assessment information to inform their lesson planning in order to maximise the progress of all pupils.

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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?	2
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?	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	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?	2
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?	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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
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
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**

5 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Holbrook High School, Holbrook, IP9 2QX

Thank you for making me so welcome and for the way in which you shared your views with me, both formally and in lessons, when I recently inspected your school. You told me you feel safe at school, there is very little bullying and you are well supported. You are proud of the new sports facilities which many of you use and enjoy. You feel well informed about how well you are achieving and what you need to do to improve further.

Your school is good and is improving. GCSE results are good and you have a broad range of options to choose from when you are 14, including courses at other schools. The quality of teaching you receive is good and, when used effectively, the interactive whiteboards make lessons more interesting and enjoyable. The school has recently introduced a better system, 'Praising Stars', for tracking how well you are doing, to praise those of you who are working hard and to provide additional support for those of you who are not achieving as well as you could.

To make you school better I have recommended that:

- managers at the school evaluate more effectively the success of interventions made to improve standards, achievement and your well-being
- teachers consistently use assessment information in planning lessons, so that all of you make the best progress you can.

Your school has many strengths and you are good ambassadors for it. Thank you for making my visit to your school so enjoyable and I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Brown

Her Majesty's Inspector