

York High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133946
Local Authority	York
Inspection number	328777
Inspection dates	3–4 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Clive Moss 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)	891
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr A Waller
Headteacher	Mr David Ellis
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2006
School address	Cornlands Road York Yorkshire YO24 3WZ
Telephone number	01904 555500
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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

York High School is an average-sized secondary school. It opened as a new school on a split-site in 2007, since when it has moved into new and refurbished premises on a single site. It had to cope with significant disruption caused by a major fire at the now-abandoned site. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. One quarter of the students has learning difficulties and/or disabilities, which is above the national average, and an above-average proportion has a statement of special educational need. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly below average, as is the proportion students known or believed to speak a first language other than English. The level of social and economic disadvantage in the area served by the school is above average. The school is designated a specialist sports college.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

York High School provides a good education for its students. Students make good progress and reach broadly average standards by the time they leave the school. National data indicates that the progress made by students is good.

Students personal development and well-being, including their, moral, social and cultural development are good, but there are fewer opportunities for students' spiritual development. Students say that they enjoy school and a genuine climate for learning is being established. The school is generally calm and orderly. Most students behave well, particularly in the often crowded social areas, and say that behaviour at the school is improving. This is confirmed by significant reductions in the number of incidents of bullying and misbehaviour, but learning is still interrupted occasionally by the misbehaviour of a few. A minority of parents are concerned about behaviour. However, several parents wrote comments to the inspection team to say that behaviour is improving, including one thanking the school for dealing with an instance of bullying promptly and effectively, with good communication with the parent. There are few instances of racism and students say reported incidents are dealt with effectively. The members of staff responsible for managing attendance carry out their duties diligently, but the percentage of students that are persistent absentees is high and proving difficult to reduce. Students respond well to the opportunities provided by the school for them to express their views and can give examples of how the school has responded. The school does not currently make sufficient use of students' views on the quality of provision at the school, to improve lessons.

The majority of lessons taught are good, although there are generally not sufficient opportunities for students to develop and practise the skills required for independent learning. The curriculum is well-planned and varied, particularly at Key Stage 4. There is not enough priority given across the curriculum at a sufficiently early stage, however, to overcome the low levels of literacy with which students enter the school and increase the progress they make. Students are cared for, guided and supported well.

The school's work as a sports college provides an effective focus for its ambition to provide more opportunities for students to achieve well and for the school to be at the heart of its local community. The contribution of the school to community cohesion is good. Most parents are supportive of the school and think it is doing a good job. This is shown in their responses to surveys by the school, involving about half of all parents, and echoed in responses to the questionnaire sent out for this inspection. The school has good capacity to improve further, as a result of the quality of its self-evaluation, effective leadership and management and evidence of the rapid improvement since the relatively recent opening of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the emphasis on literacy across the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 3, to increase the rate of students' progress in the development of literacy skills and to close the gap in attainment with other subjects.
- Ensure that lessons provide more active learning opportunities for students and genuinely enable them to learn independently. Make better use of data on students' attainment and progress and information about their views on learning to identify which approaches are most successful.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' attainment on entry to the school is below average and they have particularly low literacy skills. The school had its first set of Key Stage 4 examination results in 2008. Students' progress in mathematics was outstanding; performance in English was more modest, but students still made satisfactory progress. This difference in the progress made by students in English and mathematics means, however, that only 37% of students gained a high-grade GCSE in English, compared with 66% nationally, though performance was much better than this when other literacy qualifications are taken into account. Almost all students left the school with at least one nationally recognised qualification. No group of students underperformed significantly and the progress of boys was good, particularly those with lower attainment on entry to the school. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The school exceeded its predicted examination success rates for higher and middle-attaining students by significant margins and missed the predicted performance for lower-attaining students by only 1%. As a result, standards were higher than might have been expected, given students' starting points. Students eligible for a free school meal, however, attained less than half the school average for top grade GCSEs, but made satisfactory progress given their starting points. Students in public care made good progress. There are no significant variations in performance of students from different minority ethnic groups; group numbers are small, but, for example, Gypsy/Roma students made very good progress. The school's current data show that students are on track to exceed the challenging targets set for 2009. For example, students are currently working at significantly improved levels in English, as indicated by results from early examination entries and coursework.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The increasing range of links between York High School and other schools and colleges in York, elsewhere and internationally is broadening students' horizons and developing their social and cultural awareness. There are, however, fewer opportunities for students' spiritual development. Students socialise well with each other. They respond well to the various opportunities to take responsibility at school, for example, as members of the school council, who have been given their own budget, which they have spent on improving social facilities, such as picnic benches, and 30 students act as behaviour monitors. Students make a good contribution to their local community, for example, through sports tournaments and charity events and Year 10 students work with younger children at local primary schools. The school has achieved the national Healthy School's standard recently. Students understand how to stay safe and healthy and, for example, more than 100 cycle to school regularly, but they do not always act on what they know about healthy eating. Attendance is just below average. The school provides an increasingly broad range of opportunities for students to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for the workplace. Year 11 students have made well-informed choices about what to do after leaving school and said that their work experience and the careers education provided by the school had helped them do so. However, a higher than average percentage does not go on into education, employment or training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in lessons, because they are managed well and teachers provide activities and instructions that enable the students to meet the challenging targets they are set. Teachers have good subject knowledge, assess students' learning accurately, and offer useful guidance to them on how to improve. During the inspection, students were observed to respond best in lessons that provided more active approaches to learning. Students' enjoyment of learning was more evident in these lessons. In other lessons that still enabled students to make satisfactory and even good progress, they had insufficient opportunities to develop and practice their skills for independent learning. Students gave less positive views of otherwise satisfactory lessons where they did not feel suitably challenged and when tasks were repetitive. Students find the guidance they are given verbally more useful than the often very brief written comments they receive. The quality and frequency of marking of students' work is variable. Teaching assistants are deployed well and work very effectively, and help ensure that students are kept on task, with work that allows them to make good progress, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The well-planned and varied curriculum enables students to make good progress. At Key Stage 3, the curriculum meets statutory requirements. It is traditional and subject-based. It is supplemented by well-managed interventions to support lower attaining students. There is not, however, enough emphasis on literacy skills across the curriculum at a sufficiently early stage to overcome the low literacy skills with which students enter the school. At this early stage of its operation, the school has made it a priority to develop the curriculum at Key Stage 4, with adaptations and new courses that are matched well to students' and local needs. The school has made careful use of opportunities to enter students for examinations at an earlier stage than usual, in English, for example, and this has led already to a significantly higher percentage gaining high grades. Students with relatively low chances of achieving good grades in English are provided with opportunities to gain other literacy qualifications and this has also resulted in higher achievement. There is a good range of vocational and work related courses available, which capture students' interest. The wide and increasing range of vocational studies available at Key Stage 4, for example, is helping to improve students' enjoyment of learning and their attendance at school. The introduction of the engineering and the society, health and development diplomas has been successful. Students are enjoying the courses and achieving well. The school provides two hours per week for physical education and exercise at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and, as a specialist sports college, has expanded the range of sports-related courses at Key Stage 4, including, for example, the National Vocational Qualification in Outdoor Leadership. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is given a high priority and students make favourable comments about these lessons. There is a wide and diverse range of extra-curricular activities available, many of which are popular, but the school has not had sufficient time yet to monitor and evaluate the take-up fully.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

There is a high level of commitment to students' welfare. The school's safeguarding policy is regarded locally as a model for the whole of York. Systems for risk assessment are thorough. Procedures for child protection are understood by the staff and implemented fully. The required checks to ensure the suitability of adults to work with young people are fully in-place. The support for students at risk of underachieving, or needing additional support, is both sensitive and very effective, including, for example, for students in public care and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Several parents wrote comments to the inspection team praising specific pieces of work by the school to support their children. One thanked the school for tackling the child's behaviour problems successfully, enabling the pupil to stay in school, rather than being excluded. Another commented on the work to support a student through bereavement, stating, 'The staff and leadership team have all gone to great lengths to support and help my children'. The school has established clear procedures and approaches to promote attendance. These methods have improved attendance since the opening of the school and after problems experienced due to a major fire, so that attendance is now just below average. Students' academic progress is tracked carefully. Students are well aware of their targets and the levels they have reached currently. The data is not used consistently by teachers as a basis for lesson planning, however, and, as a result students are not always sufficiently clear about what they need to do in every subject, to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, senior leaders and other managers share a common and ambitious vision for the school. There is an unequivocal determination amongst the staff to provide an increasingly broad range of opportunities for all students to achieve well and for the school to be at the heart of its local community. As a result, there has been rapid progress in establishing vital systems and ways of working at the new school that have enabled students to make good progress, even at this early stage of the school's development. Many students praised the efforts of the school to minimise the disruption caused by the recent fire; one student commented 'they put us first'. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, involves all staff and takes account of the views of students, parents and carers. As a result, the school knows itself well, identifies areas for improvement accurately and sets challenging targets, which lead to good improvement planning. The school is strongly inclusive and promotes equality through good policies and procedures. For example, the school has set up a behaviour support unit, which has enabled students who would otherwise, in all likelihood, be excluded from school to remain in mainstream education and, as a result, the number of fixed-term exclusions has halved from 185 to 90 since the school opened. The school has been successful also in attracting a much higher than average proportion of girls to study for the engineering diploma. The school has a good understanding of the nature and needs of its local community. Students have a variety of opportunities to appreciate and engage with the local community. National and international links are becoming more effective in promoting students' wider understanding and appreciation of social diversity.

The school has a carefully structured and well-managed system for the continuous professional development of staff, which is contributing significantly to the recruitment, retention and

further development of the teaching force. The school has forged strong partnerships with a range of other education providers and external organisations. These partnerships enable it to extend its provision for students and to enhance their learning. Governors have a good understanding of the school's priorities for improvement, as well as its current strengths. They take a leading role in engaging parents and the wider community, through their work in the parents' forum and community cohesion working group, but are not involved sufficiently in evaluating the impact of the school's work, to provide appropriate challenge and support. The school provides good value for money.

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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	NA
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	3
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	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	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	3

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	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**

Inspection of York High School, York, YO24 3WZ

Thank you for talking to me and my colleagues and making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We spoke with you in lessons, around the school and in groups, looked at your work, read the results of questionnaires filled in by your parents/carers and spoke with some of your teachers. Here is a summary of our main findings, which I hope will be of interest to you.

- York High School provides you with a good education.
- You make good progress from your starting points when you join the school and the standards you reach by the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly average. You make particularly good progress in mathematics.

Your attendance has improved since the school opened, but is still a little below average and there are too many persistent absentees.

- Most of you behave well and you told us that behaviour at the school is getting better, but also that there is still a minority of students who sometimes make it difficult to learn. From the evidence I have seen, behaviour is getting better and is generally good.
- Most of your parents support of the school and many think it is doing a good job, but some of them also are concerned about behaviour.
- The school provides a wide range of courses and other activities that are helping you to learn more
- The school provides you with good care, support and guidance, particularly those of you who need additional help. This makes a very important contribution to the good progress you make.
- The headteacher and the staff at the school have a good understanding of what needs to be done to make things even better.

I have asked the headteacher and the staff to make sure that lessons provide you with more opportunities to develop and practise your skills as independent learners, based upon information about the things that help you to make good progress and your views on this. I have asked also that the school puts more emphasis on improving your literacy skills at an earlier stage, so that you can make as much progress with literacy as you do in mathematics. Many of you already make an important contribution to the school and I am sure you will want to do everything you can to support the staff in making York High School better still