

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



24 February 2009

Mr M Tweedle
Headteacher
Heckmondwike Grammar School
High Street
Heckmondwike
West Yorkshire
WF16 0AH

Dear Mr Tweedle

Ofsted subject survey: good practice in promoting equality

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 24 February 2009, to look at work in promoting equality.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: observing lessons, scrutinising school documentation, discussions with students, teachers, managers and other professionals who provide additional support to the students in the school.

The quality of provision to promote equalities is outstanding.

Features of good practice observed

- As headteacher, you nurture a culture where high achievement, both academic and in student's personal development, permeates the school. Your high expectations are shared by the strong senior leadership team, staff, students and parents. The clear focus provided by the school's specialist status in technology, science and maths, supports excellent academic achievement and as a result, many students go on to study these subjects at university. But equally, the recent additional second specialist area awarded for modern foreign languages and the training school status exemplifies the wider outlook the senior leadership team is fostering to extend student's cultural understanding and to build community cohesion.
- Because the school selects its intake by entrance examination, all students who attend the school have well-above average academic starting points at age 11 and start Year 7 with high expectations of what they are capable of achieving.

These aspirations are nurtured effectively by the school and the vast majority of students leave the school at age 18 to continue their studies in higher education.

- Robust systems are used well by the senior leadership to monitor individual student achievement. Regular termly reports to parents inform them quickly of any slowing of progress and students' targets are linked clearly to the school's predictions for individual student's achievement at ages 16 and 18. Underachievement is identified at senior leadership level by rigorous analysis of student data and an effective range of support for students is put in place by staff. Consequently, any underachievement is quickly arrested. Targets for individuals are challenging, yet attainable and as a result, students who attend the school reach excellent standards.
- The school has a much larger proportion of students than is found nationally from minority ethnic backgrounds. Within the school community, students from all backgrounds work effectively together. The students spoken to during the visit say that there is no discrimination against race, gender or economic circumstances. This is verified by the results students achieve at the end of Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, where there is no notable difference in achievement between different student groups.
- The school employs a careers adviser who ensures students and parents are provided with excellent up to date information about funding, student loans and debt management alongside giving helpful advice about suitable courses and universities. School recognises that for some families, this is their first experience of higher education and so provides additional support. Students experience taster sessions at universities and well directed work-experience. They have high expectations of what they can achieve, but this is tempered by a realistic understanding of what qualifications they need to be able to fulfil their chosen careers.
- The recent acquisition of training school status is having a significant impact on teaching and learning, both in school and in the local community. Staff are involved in a research and development group which is focusing on community cohesion and as a result, several links are being made with teachers at the local mosques and at other local schools to share expertise. Excellent links exist with local business to extend learning into the community. For example, staff from local catering firms recently took part in a food and hygiene course provided by the school, gaining a Level 2 NVQ qualification as a result.
- Good quality teaching is a feature of the school. Students show a high level of interest in their work and the atmosphere in lessons and around the school is purposeful. Students understand the school motto 'nil sine labore'. They are clear about what they need to do to improve their work, guidance from staff is highly effective and students say that staff are always prepared to 'go the extra mile' to help them at breaks or after school.
- In 2008, the students who gained a place at the school came from 70 different primary schools. The school gathers a wealth of information from the students prior to their arrival and uses this effectively to ensure transition is smooth. Early in the first term residential visits are held which enable students to build secure

relationships with staff and each other. Students who join the sixth form from other schools report that they are quickly made to feel welcome. They regard the teaching as high quality and appreciate the regular meetings with their tutors and learning mentors which enable them to keep on track with their studies. Relationships between staff and students are excellent. Students are confident and high levels of trust exist.

- Good systems are in place to support students who face emotional difficulties. Although the school, by its designation, has limited resources in comparison with some other schools, it builds good partnerships to ensure that student needs are well met. For example, it has provided a student counselling service through a partnership with 'Relate', which was well attended. It also makes excellent use of health authority resources, such as the school nurses and CAMHS, to ensure that students have good access to health and welfare advice. Good use is made of peer mentoring, with older students supporting the younger students well.
- The rich curriculum supports equality of opportunity well. Lessons are interesting and students appreciate the high level of expertise displayed by staff. Additional clubs, such as science club offer opportunities to extend the curriculum and visits, such as to Russia, enhance the students understanding of other cultures. Mandarin and Urdu are taught at lunchtime and after-school and students appreciate the wealth of opportunities provided.
- The house system is used effectively to enable older students to model good working habits. For example, sixth form students lead the house drama competitions. They write and direct their own plays, involving a cast from younger year groups. This brings cohesion across the school community and gives students good opportunities to practise the skills needed for the workplace. Similar opportunities are used well in music, sport and debating.
- Inclusion is outstanding. All students are encouraged to take an active part in all school activities and no student is excluded through financial deprivation.

Areas for development

- Continue to develop opportunities to take account of the student voice in order to inform practice in teaching and learning and in students' personal development and well-being.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop promoting equalities in Heckmondwike Grammar School.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Gill Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector