

Handsworth Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103549
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336106
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Clive Kempton HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	931
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	225
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edward Lear
Headteacher	Richard Shephard
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors, one of whom focused on ensuring that safeguarding requirements were fully met. The inspectors visited eighteen lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, senior managers, students and parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's development plan and reports by external agencies such as the school improvement partner. They scrutinised 94 parent questionnaires (the responses are shown in the annex to this report) as well as staff and student questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- what the school is doing to raise attainment across all years and support underachieving groups of boys
- why teaching is judged no better than satisfactory in the main school
- the monitoring and tracking of boys' performance and the impact of intervention strategies
- whether leaders and managers at all levels have the capacity to embed ambition and drive improvement
- whether the school has improved enough since the last inspection as some identified issues still remain, for example, tracking
- what the leadership of the sixth form has done to improve weaker performing subjects.

Information about the school

Handsworth Grammar is a voluntary aided, selective school with a small number of girls in the large sixth form. Students are selected by ability and are drawn from a wide area in and around Birmingham. Attainment on entry is high, although the school has a broader ability range than most selective schools. Approximately 90% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly of Indian and Pakistani origin. A significant proportion of students have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is low. Eligibility for free school meals is average and around half of the students in the sixth form qualify for the educational maintenance allowance. The school gained specialist status in mathematics and computing in 2004, and the Healthy Schools Award in 2007.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

At its last inspection in 2007, Handsworth Grammar School was judged to be a satisfactory school. While there has been some improvement, for example the re-structuring of the senior leadership team, a broader curriculum and the development of an electronic system to track students' progress, the overall effectiveness of the school remains satisfactory with a good sixth form.

The school has strengths:

Attainment at GCSE is well above the national average.

Attendance is high.

The school is developing a wider curriculum that meets the needs of more students.

Students enjoy the range of curriculum visits out of school.

Community cohesion is good.

All ethnic backgrounds get on well with each other.

Students' behaviour is good.

Student's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Care, and support for students is good.

Many students have the opportunity to develop leadership skills in the community, for example, in their work with local primary schools.

Although the students' attainment is high, their achievement is only satisfactory. While they make good progress in some subjects, for example mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and history, they could do better in other subjects. This is because the quality of teaching and learning has not sufficiently improved in all subjects. Its quality in the main school remains satisfactory, as in 2007. There is too much emphasis on teacher-directed activities and insufficient opportunities for students to actively engage in lessons. The extensive data collected by the school are not used effectively enough yet to help teachers plan appropriate activities to meet the needs of all students. Technical problems with the software have impeded progress.

The new senior leadership team has a satisfactory capacity to improve the school and act on the issues identified by this inspection. The headteacher is well supported by his new leadership team and, together, they have worked hard to establish new systems for tracking students' progress, although it is too early to judge their impact. The school has an accurate self-evaluation of the quality of teaching, but has not yet done enough to improve it. Currently, leaders and managers at all levels are not sufficiently held to account for standards attained.

The specialist school mathematics and computing status has had an impact on

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improving attainment in mathematics and in its local primary schools. All boys attained a higher-level grade in mathematics at GCSE in 2009. Less progress has been made with information and communication technology (ICT) in the past, although there is evidence of more positive developments. Attainment in ICT is improving, although unlike mathematics, targets have not been met.

About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by:
 - ensuring that all lessons have clear and measurable learning objectives
 - making increased use of assessment and student-progress data so that lessons are better planned to meet the needs of all learners
 - making lessons more interesting, challenging and interactive.
 - Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels are held to account for standards attained, by developing improvement plans with clear and measurable success criteria and milestones to check progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students' achievement is satisfactory. They arrive in school with high prior attainment. By the end of Year 11, they reach standards that are equally high, well above national averages. They do particularly well in mathematics and science. Students' quality of learning and the progress they make is variable across subjects but satisfactory overall. In the best lessons, they are challenged and there are a variety of activities and opportunities for them to learn independently. This results in rapid progress. In other lessons there is too much emphasis on teacher-directed activities and insufficient pace and challenge. In these lessons progress is more limited. The performance of some groups of students has been a cause for concern in the past for example Pakistani boys, but the school has made efforts to address this and there is no consistent pattern. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Students say that they enjoy school. They attend well and are punctual. Behaviour is good both in the classroom and around the school. Students have excellent attitudes to study and are keen to succeed. They appreciate the wide range of activities, trips, visits and experiences that the school offers. Relationships between staff and students are good and create an atmosphere in which effective learning can take place.

Students are articulate, numerate and literate and develop good social and workplace skills so that their future economic well-being is secure. The vast majority go on to further or higher education.

Students are well aware of the need to lead healthy lifestyles and participate

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enthusiastically in a wide range of sporting activities. They say that they feel safe in school, and that the rare instances of bullying or unsafe behaviour when reported are dealt with quickly and effectively. They have a very well developed awareness of social, moral, spiritual and cultural issues, and are keen to correct injustice. They care about their school and the local community, and volunteer for activities to improve things. This includes an active school council; involvement in the Young People's Parliament, and various charity and community links. The school generally raises over five thousand pounds each year for charity.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

While there are examples of good and even inspirational teaching, too much teaching in the school is only satisfactory and as a result, students are not achieving as well as they could across the school. In the best lessons observed:

There is a willingness to take risks and try out new ideas.

There is good use of challenging questioning.

Excellent relationships are established and good use is made of time targets.

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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Students know how well they are doing and have a clear understanding of their targets.

However, where teaching is less successful, as observed during the inspection:

The learning objectives are not clear or measurable enough, nor are they sufficiently reviewed or consolidated throughout the lesson.

There is variable assessment practice and student progress is not measured with sufficient accuracy.

Too much teaching is over-directed by the teacher and the pace of learning is too slow.

The prior learning of students is not sufficiently taken into account and students are not challenged enough.

Inspectors agree with the school's overall judgement of satisfactory for the quality of teaching. A new assistant headteacher has been appointed with a specific responsibility to improve its quality and thus improve achievement across the school. It is too early to judge the impact.

The curriculum has improved and expanded and there are more courses that meet the needs of the wider-ability range and interests of the students in both the main school and the sixth form. There are better links with outside agencies including the North West Partnership of schools and the further education college, and these courses are beginning to have a positive impact. The provision for work-related learning is currently weak, although the school has recently started work-related arrangements with the local Education Business Partnership. The innovative Year 7 'opening minds' initiative has not yet been fully evaluated to judge the value for money of the 20% of curriculum time allocated to the programme. Additional courses in the specialist subjects are also expanding the curriculum provision.

There are some good features of care, guidance and support provided for students, although their overall quality is satisfactory. Students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable who require additional help are exceptionally well supported by the school. Parents report the significant impact of the school's support for their sons, and how well it communicates with them. They say that their sons have gained from the support. This notwithstanding, support and guidance are weaker in other areas. For example, the marking of students' work is inconsistent across the school, and some parents report in the questionnaire sent as part of this inspection, that they do not feel sufficiently informed about how they can support their sons' learning at home, for example with examination-coursework deadlines.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<p>The quality of teaching</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</p>	<p>3</p>

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher is respected by students, staff and parents and is committed to the school and its improvement. The senior leadership team has changed over recent years and is now a cohesive group who support the headteacher well. There is now stronger ambition to act on entrenched issues such as improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, and collating and using the evidence from lesson monitoring to inform whole-school training needs. Leaders know there is still work to do with school-development planning, including subject-development plans, which currently do not have a sharp enough focus on explicit and quantifiable success criteria to help parents and governors measure the impact of management actions.

Management successes include an expanding personalised curriculum and the introduction of a cycle of subject reviews, where individual departments are scrutinised for two days by the senior team. Resulting reports inform future action. Successful management of the above issues, and success in promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination, demonstrate that the leadership and management of the school have a satisfactory and growing capacity to improve.

The school has a long tradition of working as a harmonious team of different faiths and cultures and is a cohesive community. It is well respected in the local community for its outreach and collaborative work and its support for local and national charities, as well as the support it provides for curriculum development in local primary schools. The duty to promote community cohesion is, therefore, successfully achieved.

The school complies with safeguarding legislation. There is strong leadership from the designated person who works well with students, staff and other agencies. The governors apply rigorous vetting procedures when appointing staff but are not yet fully aware of their responsibilities, for example having a named governor assigned to safeguarding.

Stakeholders and outside professionals associated with the school are very supportive and enjoy working with the staff and students at Handsworth. One commented, 'Partnerships are powerful. They make a difference to boys' lives.' Parents too are very supportive of how the school supports and encourages their children. One summed up the school as, 'a place that positively changed her son's life'.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Handsworth has a good sixth form which prepares students very well for higher education. Both girls and boys achieve well in their AS and A-level studies. The latest 2009 results indicate that most attain or exceed the grades expected of them, although performance is inconsistent across subjects, particularly in gaining the higher grades. Students who enter at age 16 from other schools are quickly integrated into sixth form life. All students appreciate the access to teachers to help with their studies and the opportunities given to exercise responsibility. As a result of the good, effective support and well-planned and authoritative teaching, they achieve well. Much teaching in the sixth form is inspirational and challenging and as a consequence encourages students to think independently and offer incisive commentary on the topics being studied. Occasionally, a minority of lessons lack clearly defined outcomes and it is unclear what learning is to be achieved.

The curriculum has recently been reviewed and extended. An even wider range of A-level subjects is now offered, as well as other courses such as the Cambridge Pre-University Diploma and Certificate of Personal Effectiveness. The school provides a good range of clubs and activities to broaden and stimulate students' experiences. However, there is no formal, audited programme of study for subjects and enrichment activities.

Students are articulate, personable and get on well with each other and staff. Many make a positive contribution to the school and wider community as prefects, mentors for younger pupils and helpers in local primary schools.

The good leadership and management of the sixth form have ensured that the necessary curriculum changes have been effectively implemented and that students continue to be very effectively guided and supported.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents were supportive of the school and over 90% said their children enjoyed school and that they felt safe. The biggest concern to parents was the extent to which the school helps them to support their child's learning, for example with the preparation for GCSE exams. Inspectors investigated this aspect and found that assessment and the marking of books is not being used consistently by teachers to inform students of the next steps in their learning. As a result, some students and parents do not know how to support their child's learning. Inspectors also agree with parents that there could be better communication with them about examination requirements and clearer deadlines for coursework.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Handsworth Grammar School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 94 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 931 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	19	20	69	73	5	5	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	20	21	70	74	1	1	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	35	54	57	6	6	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	19	62	66	13	14	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	15	16	66	70	12	13	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	12	53	57	26	28	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	10	11	60	64	19	20	2	2
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	17	18	59	63	10	11	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	19	20	57	61	14	15	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	20	21	52	55	17	18	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	13	52	55	19	20	3	3
The school is led and managed effectively	17	18	59	63	13	14	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	28	55	59	12	13	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 October 2009

Dear Students,

Inspection of Handsworth Grammar School, Birmingham B21 9ET

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection and what you could all do to improve the school.

When your school was last inspected in 2007, inspectors judged it to be satisfactory. We still judge it to be satisfactory. There is work for the school to do to help you learn even more in lessons, by making them more exciting and interesting, and also by challenging you more. You attain high standards compared with other schools, although some of you could do even better taking account of your ability when you entered the school.

Your attendance is good and both you and your parents tell us that you enjoy coming to school. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good too. You told us how you enjoy the trips that the school organises to help you with your work and the wide range of clubs after school that a lot of you attend.

Your teachers and all the adults in the school work hard for you and want you to succeed. When you need extra support of any kind, the staff go out of their way to support you. We were impressed with the range of leadership opportunities you have in the school, such as prefects and lunchtime monitors. It is impressive that you raise so much money for charity, and work with children in local primary schools. This helps you give something back to the Handsworth community and it is much appreciated. Your headteacher and senior staff are really committed to improving the school, and inspectors will return before too long to see how you are getting on.

In order to make the school even better, I have suggested to your headteacher and senior staff that they do the following things:

Make sure that more lessons are like the best in the school by making them more interesting and challenging, and that you all know how to improve your work.

Make sure that leaders and managers in the school develop plans with clear targets to help you get better exam results.

Clive Kempton HMI

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools

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