

Rainhill High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104830
Local Authority	St. Helens
Inspection number	336374
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Jim Kidd

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	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1444
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Steve Anderson
Headteacher	Mr John Pout
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 43 teachers and spent over half of the allotted time watching lessons. They also held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and parents and carers. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including relevant policies, the school improvement plan, analyses of students' attainment and progress and reports on the impact of specialist arts status. Inspectors analysed 104 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and 159 returned by students.

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

- the impact of the school's work in raising the attainment, learning and progress of students in the main school
- the impact of the school's strategies to improve the quality of teaching
- the impact of specialist status across the school and in the community
- the extent, quality and impact of the school's self-evaluation, particularly at middle leadership level.

Information about the school

This is a large secondary school that serves the communities to the south west of St Helens. The school intake is predominantly of White British heritage and there are very few students new to learning English. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average but has increased slightly since the previous inspection. The school has specialist status in media arts and holds the Artsmark Gold Award and Healthy Schools status. In December 2009 the school acquired foundation status and became part of the Rainhill Learning Village Trust in partnership with St Helens College and Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good and improving school. Students' attendance is high and they are prepared outstandingly well for life after formal education. Indeed, students have many opportunities to take responsibility and make an excellent contribution to the school and wider communities. As a result, they have an enviable social conscience and at the time of the inspection had already collected a considerable sum of money for the Haiti earthquake appeal. In addition, the school has excellent links with other schools and outside agencies for the benefit of the students in its charge. Specialist status, too, is having a considerable impact on students' personal and academic well-being.

Students' attainment and progress have improved since the previous inspection. All groups of students achieve well and standards at the end of Year 11 are now above the national average. The proportion reaching grades A and A* in GCSE examinations is broadly average, however, and the more-able students are not always challenged realistically enough in lessons to extend their thinking and to reach these higher standards. Standards are rising in the sixth form too but mainly in Year 12. The school recognises that it needs to share good practice in teaching across all subjects to raise attainment at A level.

Students are very proud of their school and the overwhelming majority of those who returned the inspection questionnaires are grateful for the support of the adults who work with them. As they say, 'Ours is a school in which there is always someone you can talk to if you have any problems.' The curriculum is developing apace and the extent and take-up of extra-curricular activity are both excellent.

As a result of a greater emphasis on monitoring the impact of teaching on learning and progress, teaching has improved markedly since the previous inspection and is now good, overall. Moreover, during the inspection outstanding practice was seen in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Relationships between teachers and students are a strength and students have a good understanding of their current performance and of how they can improve their work.

The school has good partnerships with parents and carers. It recognises, however, that systems for reporting students' performance and also the extent of the school's website and virtual learning environment do not always provide sufficient information to enable parents and carers to support the learning of their sons and daughters further.

Accurate and honest self-evaluation has brought about significant improvement since the previous inspection. Teachers comment: 'We have clear roles and responsibilities and self-evaluation is shared and a matter of routine. Everything we do is designed to maximise the pastoral and academic support for our students.' Without doubt,

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perceptive leadership from the headteacher and support from a committed senior team and well-informed governing body ensure that Rainhill High School has good capacity to improve further and that it provides good value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Challenge the more able students in the main school to reach the standards of which they are capable by ensuring that good practice in questioning to develop higher-order thinking skills is shared across all departments.
- Raise standards at A-level by:
 - sharing good practice in teaching across the sixth form curriculum
 - providing students with more opportunities to practise examination technique
 - continuing to develop the curriculum to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of students more closely.
- Further enhance communication between home and school to assist parents and carers even more in supporting the learning of their sons and daughters by:
 - revisiting the strategies for reporting students' learning, progress and attainment
 - completing and refining the school's website and virtual learning environment.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Most students enjoy their learning and have a keen awareness of the progress they are making. From broadly average starting points when they join the school in Year 7, students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, achieve well and make good progress in both key stages to reach above average standards by the end of Year 11. Attainment and progress have risen significantly since the previous inspection in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and the mathematics results in 2009 in particular were a significant improvement on those in 2007 and 2008. The percentage of students reaching five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics has risen year on year since 2006. Inspection evidence demonstrates that students in the current Year 11 classes are on course to reach, and in some cases surpass, their challenging targets and maintain this trend of ongoing improvement. The school is aware that the percentage of students reaching the highest grades of A and A* is broadly average and that the more-able students are not always reaching the standards of which they capable. Nonetheless, the school is rightly proud of its students' above average record over time in reaching five or more A* to G grades. Indeed, each year virtually every student leaves school with a qualification. Media arts status has a positive impact on students' learning and on the standards they reach. For example, members of the specialist subjects team often take the lead in modelling creativity in learning, problem solving and the transference of skills in group work.

Students feel safe, behave well and are courteous and welcoming to visitors. They are

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never afraid to offer advice on the importance of a balanced diet and regular exercise. They value the wide range of sports activities available to them and are particularly positive about the Fit for Life initiative. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and to the wider community. As prefects, buddies and mentors they willingly support their classmates and their younger counterparts and the student and year councils are proactive in making suggestions as to how the school can be made even better. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and specialist status has a profound impact on developing students' self-confidence and their ability to work collaboratively. Students attend a variety of educational visits at home and abroad and they have a good awareness of contemporary social issues, individual morality and citizenship. Good achievement in their academic development and the high take-up of responsibilities among all year groups mean that students are outstandingly well prepared for the next stage in their education and for their future lives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. It is characterised by warm

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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relationships in the classroom, comprehensive lesson preparation and teachers' effective use of data to plan activities to meet the differing needs of students. In the best lessons there is often very effective use of paired and group work to enable students to act as a resource for each other's learning. For example, in an outstanding Year 9 food technology lesson students were engrossed in their activities, supported each other in their learning and were able to explain the importance and value of what they were doing. Challenge in lessons to encourage students to aim for higher standards is realistic, overall, but on occasions questioning for the more-able students is not effective enough to develop their higher-order thinking skills.

The curriculum is good and there is an increasingly wide range of academic and vocational courses, including diploma programmes. Arts college status continues to play a leading role in the development of the creative curriculum and the school is a lead provider in the local area for creative and media diploma courses. Drama and media programmes have also been introduced into Key Stage 3 and the dedicated media arts week is a highlight of the school year. The curriculum supports students' personal development well and the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme in Years 7 and 8 develops students' self-confidence and belief in themselves. There is an excellent and very well-supported range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, with an emphasis on the creative and performing arts. Students speak warmly of the extensive variety of educational trips, such as visits to the First World War battlefields, the geography excursion to Spain and the performing arts visits to London and New York.

Pastoral care is outstanding and students speak highly of the care, guidance and support they receive from their teachers and from other adults who work with them. In their words: 'Our teachers look out for us. They are considerate and interested in our views.' The Raising Achievement Centre in the school has a high reputation among students who say that it has a significant impact on raising their self-esteem.

High-quality support is provided for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and also for those identified as vulnerable. As a result, they make progress which is at least in line with that of their peers.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels have a clear sense of vision and direction and there

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is a relentless focus on maximising students' achievement both academically and personally. The headteacher leads the way in driving ambition and he has established a shared sense of purpose to raise the aspirations of staff and students alike. He is supported most effectively by a talented and energetic senior leadership team and by middle leaders and other staff who are committed to ongoing improvement.

Self-evaluation is accurate and the proactive governing body plays a significant role in gauging school performance, setting realistic targets for development and challenging the leadership with rigour. Leaders are not complacent and are fully aware that more needs to be done to enhance links with parents and carers and to ensure that the more-able students consistently reach the standards of which they capable.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is good: diversity is valued and the curriculum develops students' awareness of multicultural Britain. The school has completed a clear analysis of its religious, ethnic and socio-economic context. It is now working to make closer links with local schools with a different ethnic intake.

The school's partnerships with outside agencies, including providers of further and higher education, are outstanding and are complemented by the impressive range of links developed through specialist status.

Child protection and safeguarding procedures meet current national guidelines and the school has recently improved administrative systems for record keeping.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
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	2

Sixth form

This is a good sixth form in which progression rates from Year 11 and retention rates

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within courses are improving markedly. Attainment, learning and progress are rising, particularly in Year 12 where they are above average, but students do not have enough opportunities to refine their examination technique in order to reach higher standards in Year 13. Attendance rates are consistently above average and students make a good contribution to the school and wider community, for example as literacy and community sports leaders.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are working hard to share good practice across all subjects to raise standards at A level. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and their students have the utmost confidence in them, commenting that students are guided and supported well. The curriculum is good and there is a balance of courses: academic, vocational and inspired by media arts. Nevertheless, the school is aware that further development is needed in order to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs, interests and aspirations of a changing intake.

Leadership and management are good. Leaders evaluate performance accurately and monitoring systems are robust and aid the rapid identification of underachievement. The student voice is taken seriously and the sixth form council is highly valued by students.

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

A very large majority of parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire are entirely satisfied with what the school is doing for their sons and daughters. Several make particular mention of the good teaching and of the caring ethos in school and add that teachers are approachable when their offspring experience difficulties. They believe that the school does much to make sure that students arriving from primary school settle down quickly into their new surroundings. A small minority are of the view that the school could inform them more regularly about the progress their sons and daughters are making. In addition, some parents and carers believe that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors judge that there is a very small minority of students who do not always behave as well as they should, but that behaviour management strategies employed by staff are generally very effective indeed and that behaviour in the school is good, overall.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Rainhill High 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 104 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,444 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	14	31	27	60	3	7	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	10	22	27	60	5	11	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	13	29	26	58	4	9	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	14	31	25	56	4	9	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	13	29	28	62	4	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	20	27	60	7	16	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	16	31	69	3	7	3	7
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)	9	20	30	67	4	9	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	12	27	27	60	5	11	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	24	20	44	8	18	3	7
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	7	16	26	58	8	18	1	2
The school is led and managed effectively	10	22	25	56	6	13	2	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	15	33	23	51	7	16	0	0

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.



10 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Rainhill High School, Prescott, L35 6NY

Thank you all so much for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We are particularly grateful to those of you who gave up part of your lunchtime to talk to us on Monday and Tuesday. You were very friendly and polite and represented your school and your families very well. You were very interested about how the inspection was going so I thought I would write to you to tell you what we found.

Rainhill High is a good and improving school and so many of you are very proud of it. You are making good progress in your studies because your teachers teach you well and give you good advice about how you can improve your work. As a result, standards are rising in the main school and also in Year 12. The school's specialist status in media arts is having a positive impact in all areas of school life. Your personal development is good too: you feel safe in school, you behave well and your attendance is excellent. You do a lot to take responsibility within school and also outside its walls and you have already raised a considerable sum of money for the Haiti appeal. Your teachers and teaching assistants take good care of you and the school is developing the curriculum in all years to meet your needs and interests more closely.

Your headteacher, governors and all the other staff are proud of your school too and they are always looking for ways to make Rainhill High even better. To help them do this, I have asked them to challenge you even more to reach the highest GCSE grades and to share the good practice already evident in the sixth form across all subjects, so that the results at A level can be better. I have also asked them to look more closely at how they report your progress to your parents and carers and how the school's website can be developed to provide even more information to those who support you at home. Thanks again for your contribution to the inspection and best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Jim Kidd

Lead Inspector

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