

The Harwich School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115369
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338579
Inspection dates	23–24 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Miller

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
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	1251
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	173
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Nigel Mountford
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2007
School address	Hall Lane Dovercourt Harwich, Essex
Telephone number	01255 245460
Fax number	01255 241144
Email address	admin@harwich.essex.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. 41 lessons were visited, and other observations of classes, displays, students' work and their day-to-day activities were undertaken. Inspectors held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students, the school council, and talked with parents/carers. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation including policies, self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring files, safeguarding documentation, governors' minutes and reports, and information for parents/carers. Inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 73 parents/carers, 180 students and 119 staff.

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

- the quality of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and modern languages, and the progress made in improving standards in these subjects
- the school's use of assessment in order to improve learning and progress, and ensure suitable challenge for all groups of students
- the impact of governors, and senior and middle leaders in driving improvement throughout the school
- the school's curriculum and its development of vocational and alternative courses to meet the needs of individual students 14-19.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average secondary school, serving a mixed social area in and around Harwich. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, including those for whom English is an additional language, is below average. The percentage who are eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of pupils who require additional learning support, nearly a third, is above average, but the percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school is part of the Confederation of Coastal Schools. It was designated as a specialist school with Language College status in 2000 and re-designated as such in September 2005. It holds the Healthy Schools Award, an Arts Mark, a Sports Mark and the International Schools Award.

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

2

Main findings

The school's effectiveness is satisfactory, and it is improving. One family wrote to inspectors: 'In recent months and years something has happened at The Harwich School. The teaching staff have moved up a gear, and staff try to maximise each child's potential.' Inspectors agree. At its last inspection, in 2007, the school was taken out of a Notice to Improve category. However, the improvements in the school's organisation and provision had not had time to impact on the 2008 results. Attainment by Year 11 remained low. This subsequently changed significantly. In summer 2009, the percentage of students gaining five or more A*-C passes increased from 43% to 53%. Provisional results indicate the school is now performing well when compared with similar schools nationally. The school met its target of 37% for A*-C passes including English and mathematics, as set under the National Challenge programme. Although attainment by Year 11 remains below average, it has improved from being low. School data and inspection evidence show that students in Years 8 to 13 begin their courses this academic year with higher levels of attainment than has been the case in previous years. A parent/carer wrote: 'The school has worked extremely hard to raise levels, and I believe they don't get enough praise for doing so.' Given their starting points when they join the school, students now make satisfactory progress.

The key to the school's improvement has been threefold. First, leadership, at all levels, has strengthened significantly over the past couple of years, and is now good. Self-evaluation, monitoring, and taking action to secure improvement are rigorous. Middle leaders have welcomed being given more responsibility for evaluating performance and leading school development. This has had a positive impact on overall school improvement. Secondly, a very effective tracking system, which monitors individual students' progress, was instituted in 2008. This is playing a major part in raising attainment, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Thirdly, the school has a good curriculum with a range of courses which meet individual students' needs well. This is making learning more relevant and enjoyable. The impact of all this provides evidence for the school's good capacity for further improvement. A student wrote: 'I believe the school is most definitely improving and going in the right direction.'

The school knows well where pivotal improvements are necessary. Its tracking system is due to be established fully for all year groups by the end of the current term. This is an important target and milestone for the school. Work on improving assessment strategies and approaches to marking are underway, but at present remain too inconsistent across the school. School data shows standards in English and mathematics are rising, and meeting their challenging targets, but are not yet high enough. Attainment in modern languages remains relatively weak. Together with science, modern languages has now

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been added voluntarily to the school's National Challenge strategy. These subjects demand continued, close monitoring to ensure the required gains in students' performance. Whilst the attendance of most students is satisfactory, there is persistent absence by a small minority. Attendance is therefore inadequate overall. The school is working cooperatively with families and local community organisations to reduce such absence.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise further students attainment and achievement across the school by:
 - ensuring that the improved systems for tracking students' progress are established fully, for all year groups, for the start of Spring Term 2010
 - establishing a more consistent approach to using assessment in the classroom, not only to share existing good practice but also to improve further the impact of teaching on the quality of students' learning
 - ensuring a more consistent approach to the marking of students' work, within faculties, in order to aid students' understanding of what they need to do to improve
 - ensuring the continued, close monitoring and support for the school's National Challenge subjects: English, mathematics, science and modern languages.
- Continue the good work being undertaken with students, and the families of students, who are persistent absentees in order to:
 - improve the attainment, learning and progress of such students
 - raise attendance rates to the school's National Challenge target of 92% by the end of the current academic year
 - ensure the school pursues plans with local institutions, organisations and the community police to help in the monitoring of persistent absentees.
- 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.

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

Students achieve satisfactorily because the school's new tracking system is ensuring the close monitoring of all students. Consequently, teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the needs of individuals and groups of students. This is enabling progressively challenging targets to be set. By Year 11 in 2009 this led to some significant success in some arts subjects, physical education, information and communication technology, and vocational courses such as health and social care, and travel and tourism.

The sound progress now being made by students was to be seen, for example, in GCSE English lessons on 'Romeo and Juliet'. Students in a lower set were actively encouraged to express their personal views about key characters, and their notes reflected

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satisfactorily the breadth of class discussion. In a middle set Year 11 mathematics lesson students secured their skills in calculating percentages because the teacher's questioning encouraged the students to think through and explain their working. Average standards, but good achievement was seen in Year 7 'Learning 2 Learn' lessons where students used their 'thinking hats' well to develop their thoughts and reflections on slavery.

Regarding behaviour, a student commented: 'It is generally good, except for a few individuals. The school should be given more credit.' Inspectors agree, and find that students' attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons are good; this makes a strong contribution to their learning. Around the school, students generally show considerate behaviour towards each other. However, the tendency of a minority to leave litter at break and lunchtimes is unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, many different groups of students say they feel safe with few parents/carers raising concerns. As a new Year 7 student wrote: 'I love my new school. When I began they made me feel welcome and safe. I enjoy coming to school every day.' Students feel their school council has improved school life through the thoughtful and influential decisions they have taken. Students understand safe situations and have responded positively to the school's health promotion strategies, including using a new fitness centre. There is a good take-up for the various sports and dance activities offered. Students show sound interest in other people's feelings, values and beliefs, although this is mainly confined to lessons and the multicultural influence of minority ethnic staff in the school. Students understand well the consequences of their actions and the need to share common values as a community.

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	3
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	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3

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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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

A parent states: 'The school has gone from strength to strength, improving teaching skills and giving the children an environment where they want to learn.' Whilst teaching is satisfactory overall, there is an increasing proportion of good or better teaching. Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good. Teaching assistants provide good support to help students who have difficulty with their learning to make at least satisfactory progress. Teachers' oral feedback to students is most often good, and the final marking of assessed units of work accurate. However, the day-to-day marking of students' workbooks is inconsistent and does not reinforce sufficiently what they need to do to improve. The use of assessment to support learning in the classroom is in the early stages of development. In some lessons teachers talk too much, which results in some passive learning. Students are getting a feel for good teaching, and where some unsatisfactory teaching was seen, the students clearly recognised this. Nevertheless, students do receive good care and support. Another student wrote: 'Throughout my years at the school everyone has helped me in some way. The staff and teachers have helped me make important decisions towards what I want to do when I leave.'

The curriculum is providing well for the development of key skills at Key Stage 3, through the new cross-curriculum 'Learning 2 Learn' course. The school is at the forefront of the development of diploma qualifications. Good links with other schools and colleges broaden the offering to students. There are clear pathways from Years 7 to 13. Enrichment programmes, both taught and extra-curricular, are outstanding, including the programme of visits. Links with other countries broaden perspectives both of the students who go on visits and those at home with whom they share these experiences.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
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?

'We work well as a whole team and our efforts are always appreciated.' 'The school has

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worked so hard to raise standards, and I'm proud to be part of the team.' Such staff comments illustrate well how the good leadership and management, at all levels throughout the school have led to improvement over the past two years. This has been central in raising both standards and achievement. Students, staff and parents alike praise the vision of the headteacher in enabling the school, as a community, to get back on the right track. There has been extensive monitoring of teaching and learning by senior and faculty leaders. Joint lesson observations during the inspection confirm the accuracy of the senior leadership team's judgements about teaching. In the past two years, some tough decisions have been taken, and where teaching has proved unsatisfactory, due action taken. Good governance results from close links with the school and an informed understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. However, a few governors are seen by some staff as having a lower profile than the majority. Governors and school managers are working with local community groups and leaders to resolve the issue of students who are persistent absentees. Procedures for safeguarding students are good; the students' welfare and security have priority. The school is implementing well its action plan to promote community cohesion, and inclusion throughout the school is good, as a result of clear action planning. Financial management and the effective use of resources are good, and support well students' learning. Nevertheless, in terms of the outcomes for students, the school currently provides satisfactory value for money.

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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
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

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

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The school's inclusive approach in enabling students to enter the sixth-form with fewer than 5 A*-C GCSE passes means that attainment on entry is below average. Students generally make satisfactory progress to achieve standards which are broadly average. Most remain on their courses and almost all gain relevant qualifications. A well-planned variety of pathways, particularly in vocational courses, meet well the students' needs and aspirations. The good personal education and citizenship programme is well received by students. The majority work effectively, although a few lack the confidence to pursue additional opportunities to extend their learning. Most are keen to do well and are enthusiastic towards learning.

The team of sixth-form tutors know their students very well. Care, guidance and support are effective. Consequently, students are prepared appropriately for the next phase in their lives. Tutors are particularly strong in supporting students in their university applications. Almost all participate in some form of education, training or employment on leaving school. Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall, helping students to learn and prepare for the wider demands and expectations of independent work beyond school. However, assessment is not used consistently across all departments and courses. Nevertheless, teachers challenge students appropriately by setting suitable targets and regularly reviewing students' progress. Increased rigour in systems for tracking and monitoring progress is now extending the good practice that has been established by Year 11. Leaders and managers have a sound understanding as to how the sixth-form should improve. Although resources are managed well, it is recognised that current student facilities are not fit for purpose. Proposals have been drawn up with the local authority for a new building on the main school site.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Although relatively few parents/carers responded to the inspection questionnaires, a very large majority were positive in their support for the school. A number of individual concerns raised by parents/carers were taken up with the school, and in a small number of specific cases telephone conversations were held between the lead inspector and parents. A few parents/carers raised issues relating to the students' behaviour, progress and achievement. Inspectors find that a number of the concerns expressed do not take into account the improvements made by the school and its students in the last year. Concerns about healthy lifestyles related mainly to the school's canteen provision. This is being resolved as funding has been secured to build new facilities starting in January

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2010. Overall, the views of most parents/carers can be summarised by this comment: 'We know the school needs to improve further. However, we feel the management of the school is on course, and fundamental changes have happened.'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Harwich 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 73 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1251 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	23	32	45	62	3	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	15	21	52	71	3	4	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	21	29	39	53	3	4	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	27	39	53	5	7	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	19	26	38	52	5	7	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	12	16	45	62	9	12	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	19	41	56	9	12	2	3
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)	12	16	47	64	4	5	2	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	10	14	49	67	5	7	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	15	45	62	7	10	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	9	13	46	64	7	10	4	6
The school is led and managed effectively	21	29	36	50	3	4	3	4
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	26	41	56	3	4	2	3

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.



25 September 2009

Dear Students,

Inspection of The Harwich School, Harwich, CO12 3TG.

We would like to thank you for the very friendly welcome you gave to us when we visited you recently. We judge that yours is a satisfactory, but improving school. As one of you wrote to us: 'I do really enjoy school because it helps me towards a better future, and I also get a chance to hang out with my good friends!'

These are the things we found are best about your school.

It is led and managed well, and this is helping to raise standards.

The staff at your school are committed to help you achieve and make progress.

You have a good curriculum, which meets your interests and aspirations well.

You behave well and show a positive interest in learning and your lessons.

These are the things we have asked your school to do now, in order to help you gain even higher levels and grades.

Make sure the new systems for tracking your progress are fully in place, for all year groups, by the end of 2009.

For your teachers to continue their work to improve further the ways they plan to assess your learning in lessons, and mark your workbooks. This is to provide you with additional help and guidance as to your next steps in learning.

To ensure the continued, close monitoring of teaching and learning in English, mathematics, science and modern languages. As you know, these are your school's National Challenge subjects.

In addition, a small minority of you do not attend school regularly enough. Your headteacher tells you that one day's absence each week adds up to a whole year's education between Years 7 and 11. We have asked your staff to continue their good efforts with the families of those of you who are persistent absentees. We are challenging you all to raise attendance to 92% by summer 2010.

Finally, we are setting you another task. A number of you leave too much litter around at break and lunchtimes. Please, encourage each other to use the waste-bins provided. This is your responsibility, as citizens, to the community.

With all best wishes for your future,

Michael Miller
Lead Inspector

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