

Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115373
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338582
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2010
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	1384
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janet Dyson
Headteacher	Simon Knight
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2006
School address	Parsonage Downs Great Dunmow Essex
Telephone number	01371 872560
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 52 lessons, four tutorial sessions and an assembly, observing 52 teachers. Learning support staff were observed in a range of contexts. Professional feedback was offered to all staff who were observed teaching. Senior staff were invited to conduct a number of joint observations of teaching and learning with HMI

Inspectors held meetings with governors, staff, and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including the minutes of governing body meetings, the school improvement plan and details of the school's partnership work. They scrutinised the students' work, the school's records, the 149 parental questionnaires returned. A total of 36 student and 50 staff questionnaires were also evaluated.

- The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:
- the impact of the school's focus on the students' current learning and progress
- the progress made by vulnerable students
- the quality of teaching
- the school's safeguarding procedures.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average and draws students from North-West Essex. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well-below the national average. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is a quarter of the national figure and the proportion of those whose first language is not English is low.

The proportion of students registered by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is just below the national figure, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. There are a small number of children in the school who are looked-after by the local authority.

The school has been granted humanities specialist status and has received the following national accreditations: Investors in People; Training School; International School (intermediate level); the Healthy School Award; and the ArtsMark (Silver).

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

This is a satisfactory school that has made considerable progress in the last year. Outcomes for individuals and groups are satisfactory and show a rising trend. Standards have improved in the last two years and students are currently making satisfactory progress. As a result of the school's early entry examination policy, over half the students in Year 11 have secured a higher grade GCSE in both English and mathematics prior to the start of the 2010 examination cycle. Equality of opportunity is good; the progress of those with special educational needs and/or difficulties is satisfactory; well-considered support and intervention procedures are helping vulnerable students and the small numbers of students from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds progress as well or better than their peers.

Teaching is satisfactory; there are no significant inadequacies in particular subjects or across year groups. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is satisfactory and an emerging strength of the work of senior staff. Marking is satisfactory, although variations remain between departments. The most effective teaching secures high level oral responses from students. Opportunities to enhance engagement are missed in some lessons where the lesson is not sufficiently focussed on the expected learning outcomes or where planning was not clearly linked to the students learning needs. Over 45% of lessons were good or better; in an outstanding mathematics lesson the teacher made very good use of the outcomes of assessment to inform the lesson. Questioning was excellent and the vibrant dialogue secured with the group produced outstanding learning.

The range of curriculum opportunities provided is satisfactory, although more could be done to enhance the range of key skills developed in Key Stage 3. The range of the 'out of school hours' provision is good. The range of vocational courses is appropriate and new diploma courses are planned.

Behaviour is good and the number of exclusions has declined significantly in the last three years to below the national figure. Attendance is above the national average. The students' contribution to the school and the local community is good and so is community cohesion.

The care, welfare and guidance provided are good. Parents and students spoke positively about the nature of the individual support available and students spoke of 'staff going out of their way for you'. Effective academic guidance is based on a robust assessment evidence base. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Governance is good. The minutes of the governing body meetings provide clear evidence of effective support and challenge for senior staff and of a governing body with a clear focus.

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Effective financial management by governors and senior staff have eliminated a previous budget deficit.

The leadership team has done well to secure the improvements in standards, achievement, behaviour and attendance, which have been achieved in the last year. The school's self-evaluation is good and its capacity to improve further is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards further by focusing teaching on learning outcomes.
- Develop greater consistency in assessment for learning by:
 - further refining the tracking of student progress
 - seeking greater consistency in marking
 - ensuring all lessons are planned effectively to match the students' learning needs.
- Enhance the individualisation of the curriculum by broadening the base of the vocational courses available to enhance student transition between courses and key stages.
- 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**

Standards have risen steadily in the last two years and the proportion of students gaining five higher grade GCSE including English and mathematics, is just above the national average. The results of GCSE examinations taken early in Year 11 confirm this continued improvement with results in English and mathematics already above those secured in 2009.

The school's robust assessment evidence base confirms that vulnerable students and those with special educational needs now make satisfactory progress and this was confirmed by a scrutiny of the students' classwork. A measure of this success is that the proportion of students gaining five higher grade GCSE including functional literacy and numeracy, is significantly above the national average.

Attainment on entry is close to the national average. The students' current learning and performance in the classroom mirror the improvements established in the most recent examination results. In almost all lessons, students make satisfactory progress. Lesson outcomes are strongest where there is a clear focus on what the students are expected to learn and they respond well to this challenge.

Enjoyment and achievement are satisfactory, with strengths evident in the rising numbers of students who are successfully entered early for public examinations. The inspection questionnaires noted that 97% of parents were positive on 'feeling safe' and inspectors observed good procedures to support this view. Students were equally confident on this matter.

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Behaviour is good and the sensible movement of students in some of the school's confined corridors is impressive. Attendance has risen steadily for three years and is above the national average. A good range of popular healthy school meals are available and the proportion of students engaged in sport is high. The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with notable strengths in their moral and social progress.

The range of workplace and other skills the students develop towards their future economic well-being are satisfactory because learning and progress is now satisfactory. The proportion of students who leave to take up places in employment, education or training is above the local and national averages.

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	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	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory. In the best lessons, the teachers' subject knowledge was a real strength with marking and the use of assessment to enhance learning good and relationships positive. In these lessons, the quality of questioning drove the lesson forward and students knew what was expected from them. In an

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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effective Year 9 science lesson on metal ores, students were particularly attentive to the initial research-based task. The well-directed questioning that followed seized on the best student responses to develop the desired learning outcomes. Students were keen to show what they knew, understood and could do and teaching was a polished, professional performance. In a calm and effective GCSE geography lesson, well-planned resources and peer group activities provided the students with the skills to improve their coursework. Less effective lessons failed to match the level of challenge to the students' learning needs or missed opportunities to focus on the key skills important to their future progress. In these lessons, the challenge provided by commercial worksheets limited progress during significant parts of the lesson.

In the last year the school has developed a secure assessment data base that some staff are using effectively to enhance learning. Senior managers' tracking of student progress is accurate but not all departments use this data consistently.

The curriculum is satisfactory and the range of vocational provision is broadly similar to that found nationally. However, the development of key skills to aid the transition to the next stage of learning is inconsistent. The specialist humanities subjects are led by the English department and the impact of the work of the 'learning zone' on the rising standards in this area is evident.

The care, support and guidance provided are good. There is strong liaison with feeder schools, and an effective focus on attendance. The quality of pastoral care is appreciated by parents and students, and the impact of this provision can be seen in the students' positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour.

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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior management team have done well to raise standards, improve behaviour and attendance, balance the budget and grow the sixth form into a viable provision. Self-evaluation is accurate and governance works effectively with the senior team. The dedication of the headteacher and his senior colleagues to the school is impressive. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Senior staff conducted nine joint observations with the inspection team and the evaluations they offered closely matched the judgements given by inspectors. Equality of opportunity is good and senior staff have worked hard to improve the academic support and guidance for the less-able to match the effective pastoral care. A number of parents commented

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on the improvements in the school's engagement with parents in the last two years. Partnerships with feeder primary schools and other educational establishments are good and this has helped to secure good community cohesion. The school has secured international school status for its work with African and eastern European schools.

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	3
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	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

Standards are satisfactory and rising steadily. The educational value added between Year 11 and Year 13 is satisfactory overall but stronger for those on vocational courses. Increasing numbers of students are choosing to stay on in the sixth form and communication with parents has improved. However, attendance is well-below expectations in a number of classes.

A relatively large proportion of sixth form students have responsibilities in the school and many give freely of their own time to work in the local community service. Care, guidance and support are good: transition arrangements into the sixth form are appreciated by students. There is a developing tutorial system but it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this new provision.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The new team have introduced greater accountability and more consistent academic monitoring.

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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	2

Views of parents and carers

The very large majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were positive about most aspects of the school. Some parents expressed concerns regarding the management of behaviour and whether the school took account of parent and carers concerns or suggestions. However, inspectors found the management of behaviour effective, the students well-mannered and compliant. A number of parents and carers wrote positively about their children's experience of the school and the efforts made by staff at all levels to provide both pastoral and academic support. Some commented very positively regarding the open evenings and others noted the enthusiasm of staff.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre 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 149 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1384 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	30	93	63	8	5	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	51	34	93	63	2	1	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	57	39	80	54	9	6	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	38	26	83	56	19	13	4	3
The teaching is good at this school	30	20	94	64	10	7	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	22	87	59	18	12	2	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	26	18	99	67	16	11	0	0
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)	33	22	95	64	11	7	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	32	22	90	61	18	12	3	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	29	20	83	56	22	15	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	14	86	58	24	16	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	51	34	79	53	11	7	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	49	33	79	53	10	7	4	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



12 May 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre,
Great Dunmow, CM6 2AU

As you know, your school was inspected recently and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. I would like to thank you for your openness, friendliness and courtesy during our visit. The inspectors enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your comments and opinions. Helena Romanes is a friendly school where staff know you well and many of you noted in the pupil questionnaire how much staff care and support you. Inspectors judged this care, guidance and support to be good and many of your parents took the time to write to me providing positive examples of the support you receive. Inspectors were impressed by your behaviour and the above average rate of attendance in the main school, but we also noted how many sixth formers do not attend regularly. The quality of the learning opportunities provided for you has improved significantly and it is really good to see how well you respond to challenging work and imaginative teaching. Standards are rising and the results from your early entry to GCSE English and mathematics are impressive.

I have asked the headteacher and governors to direct the school's efforts during the next two years on raising standards further by focusing teaching on the quality of learning; using assessment and marking to track your progress; and by broadening the curriculum opportunities provided.

I wish you well and look forward to hearing of your future successes.

Yours sincerely

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

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