

Highfields Science Specialist School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104386
Local Authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	355573
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	James McNeillie HMI

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1505
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	286
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Sedgebeer
Headteacher	Mark Capel
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2007
School address	Boundary Way Penn, Wolverhampton WV4 4NT
Telephone number	01902 556530
Fax number	01902 556531
Email address	enquiries@hs3.org.uk

Age group	11–19
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Inspection number	355573

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the documentation in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

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

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2011

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. Inspectors observed forty nine lessons taught by forty nine teachers, held meetings with students, staff, members of the governing body and the School Improvement Partner. They observed the school's work, and looked at documentation provided by the school, including its development plan, analyses of students' achievement and the minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors also considered the views expressed by parents and carers in the 281 questionnaires received as well as those from students and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- To what extent is the achievement of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from all backgrounds improving sufficiently?
- To what extent are the provision and leadership of science, the school's specialist subject, challenging enough to ensure continued rise in attainment?
- Is the quality of teaching, including the use of assessment, good enough to secure better than expected progress for all groups of students?
- How well do leaders at all levels contribute to improving achievement and other outcomes for all groups of students?

Information about the school

This is a much larger than average secondary school serving the south of Wolverhampton. The school is part of a sixth form consortium of four local schools. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average, but this proportion is rising. The student population is ethnically diverse with most students being from White British and Indian heritages. The number of students speaking English as an additional language is much higher than is the case nationally. However, the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including statements, is lower than the national average. The school is part of the Building Schools for the Future Programme with work due to be completed in September 2012. The school recently received a cultural diversity award from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

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

'My child moved to Highfields from a different school where he was unhappy. He is a different child: motivated, happy and secure.' This response from a parent encapsulates some of the outstanding features of this good school. Students achieve well. The proportion leaving with grade C or above in five GCSE subjects including English and mathematics is well above the national average. In 2010, all students left school with at least one GCSE or equivalent and the overwhelming majority left with at least five GCSEs or equivalent. All groups of students feel safe and the school has highly effective procedures to ensure this. They have a strong voice, feel proud of their school and contribute extensively to the school and its wider community. Students' excellent cultural development is supported by the school's outstanding promotion of community cohesion and its culturally diverse population. Their spiritual, moral and social development is equally well developed. These factors, coupled with positive attitudes to learning and strong relationships between students and teachers, result in good behaviour.

Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan lessons well to cater for a range of needs and use assessment and questioning effectively. Where teaching is less good, teachers spend too much time talking to students and there are missed opportunities at the end of lessons to reinforce the learning, rather than the activities that have taken place. Many teachers enable students to develop as independent learners but this is not always the case and some do not ensure students are sufficiently involved in reflecting on what they have learnt. The school's curriculum has been a key factor in addressing previous underperformance of some groups of students and in supporting essential work-based skills. Exceptionally high levels of care, guidance and support are given to students, particularly for those whose personal circumstances make them vulnerable, and this enables them to make the very best of the opportunities provided by the school. For example, one student who had missed a large chunk of her education due to low attendance attained the highest grades in some subjects and is now studying a range of subjects at A level.

The school's detailed and accurate self-evaluation has been a key strength in its journey of improvement. The headteacher's clear vision of building the capacity of leaders within the school has resulted in a shared vision at all levels. The restructured school specialism is having a positive impact on the curriculum in science and other areas as well as in the wider school community. Since the previous inspection, students' achievement has risen as has the quality of many aspects of their personal development. The quality of teaching, the curriculum, the care and support students receive and the effectiveness of the sixth form have also improved. These factors, together with more effective leadership, support the school's good capacity to realise its vision of enabling confident, resilient and independent learners.

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the proportion of good and outstanding teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - the existing opportunities for students to develop as confident and independent learners are enhanced
 - there is a consistently high level of challenge all the way through learning sessions
 - activities at the end of lessons reinforce the learning that has taken place and involve students in reflecting on their own learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students' overall attainment is above average. Their attainment in English is significantly above national averages and previous underachievement in science is being reversed. All groups of students make good progress from their average starting points. Detailed analysis of the school's substantial and robust tracking systems confirm that this upward trend is expected to continue for all groups of students in this ethnically diverse school.

The quality of students' learning observed during the inspection was similarly good. In a Year 9 English lesson, students displayed strong attitudes to learning while writing a comparison of two poems and this supported them in making good progress. In a GCSE food technology lesson, students responded exceptionally well to their teacher's high expectations and took responsibility for evaluating their own work. The impact of the school's project-based learning curriculum in Year 7 has increased students' speaking and listening skills as well as their ability to work in teams. However, at times, students lack confidence in their responses to questions asked of them in lessons. Those individuals with specific learning needs are well supported by the school's learning support assistants to develop and apply skills with increasing independence. Students who speak English as an additional language receive extra support when necessary and this enables many of them to exceed expectations.

Students enjoy their time at Highfields, demonstrated in their positive behaviour, above average attendance and punctuality to lessons. By the time they leave school, they have a clear understanding of what is needed to be successful and have the necessary skills for the next stage of their lives. The overwhelming majority of students are in education, employment or training when they leave at the end of their school career. As a result of a range of opportunities available to them, students take on roles of responsibilities, for example in peer mentoring, which they do very well. The introduction of 'headteacher lunches' has been very popular and allowed a wide range of students to express their views directly to the headteacher. All students contribute to charity fundraising, with particularly strong links with local charities. The harmonious community of the school is evident in the way that each other's differences and similarities are celebrated. Students are consistently confident that any issues will be resolved quickly and positively.

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

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

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

How effective is the provision?

The large majority of teaching observed was good or better. In these lessons, learning activities are engaging with opportunities for group work and practical activities supported by lively teacher input. The school's lesson planning structure is used well to ensure support and challenge for individual learners is built into planning. This means that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are able to participate fully in lessons and make similar progress to their peers. Students understand what they need to do to achieve because teachers explain success criteria well and make reference to them regularly in lessons. Teachers' feedback to students is good. When there are double or triple lessons, the pace and challenge does sometimes slow towards the end of these sessions. On occasions, students' muted responses to teachers' questions indicated a lack of confidence in contributing. This was often linked to teachers dominating lessons and not giving students sufficient thinking time to respond or good opportunities for independent learning.

The school's curriculum meets students' needs and enables personalised choices, the impact of which is seen in increasing achievement and narrowing of gaps for specific groups of students. The developing curriculum at Key Stage 3 is supporting students to apply skills in a range of contexts and giving them experiences of real world situations. This was particularly evident during the inspection when a group of Year 7 students with a range of special educational needs were working with representatives from a construction

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

company. The curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 is having a positive impact on students' outcomes. There is a good balance of academic and vocational options which extend the most able students and support disaffected students in remaining in education. The school's specialism has enhanced the curriculum, for example in science master classes. The school's outdoor education centre is used extensively to enrich students' experiences, as does the wide range of extra-curricular activities.

There is a strong pastoral structure in place which ensures that the needs of students, especially the most vulnerable, are met exceptionally well. An example of this is the weekly inclusion team meeting which includes other agencies and creates solutions for removing barriers to learning for individual students, with a high degree of success. Pupils are set aspirational targets and progress towards these is tracked every half term, by staff at all levels, and interventions for individuals and groups agreed and implemented. There is an innovative options guidance package for Year 9 students ensuring that they begin courses on which they are most likely to be successful. Of particular note is the provision of a learning guide, in addition to a year manager and head of year, for each year group who reviews progress with individual and small groups of students. Good provision for students with particular needs is aided by very effective learning support assistants in lessons.

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	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's strategic leadership, ably supported by his senior colleagues, has resulted in a much improved school since the previous inspection. Self-evaluation is accurate and involves all staff and relevant partners. Students and staff are set challenging targets. Opportunities for leaders to be developed within the school have been seized and the result is that leadership is good at all levels. Leadership of the school's specialism has been restructured to create a mathematics and science learning school and this has supported the increase in attainment in science. Specialist status leaders have also led successful in-school teacher training. Staff morale is high and there is a collective understanding of what further improvements are needed. There is no tolerance of complacency and the school's future development is very much focused on increasing all aspects of students' achievement and well-being.

The governing body holds the school to account well and its members have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Recent developments, such as creating link governors for subjects and areas of the school improvement plans are being developed further. At the time of the inspection, the effectiveness of safeguarding

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

procedures was outstanding. School leaders offer advice to other institutions on safeguarding and, as a result of this school's work, a commercial company working closely in supporting the new building has adopted the school's high quality policies. Outstanding partnerships support curriculum development and the care of students. Work with parents and carers has developed well since the previous inspection and is demonstrated in the overwhelmingly positive responses received from Ofsted's questionnaires. The school analyses students' achievement, attendance, behaviour patterns and uptake of activities in detail and is proactive in narrowing any gaps. For example, previous underperformance by middle ability boys was reversed by improving the literacy levels of these students. Leaders have an excellent understanding of the school's context and are constantly extending students' understanding of the local, national and international communities. Recent links have been established with international communities that are not represented in the school's population.

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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students' progress is good and improving. Success rates are high, attendance is above average, students enjoy their experiences and contribute well to the wider school community. In many Key Stage 5 lessons students have opportunities to develop their skills of critical thinking and independence, but this is inconsistent across subjects. The overall quality of teaching is good which is contributing to students' improving outcomes. Another factor in this is the strong curriculum offer that is enabled by the school's involvement in a consortium. This ensures students' interests are met and progression to internationally renowned universities or high quality work-based training is possible. The level of care for these students is of a similar quality to that in the rest of the school as is demonstrated by one parent's comment that: 'The school has supported my son in the choices he has made for 6th form giving good advice and guidance. I feel Highfields has

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

helped my son become the young man he is now: he is fulfilling his potential and being supported all the way.' Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses very well and are effectively addressing some in-school variations in quality. There are robust quality assurance procedures in place within the school as well as across the consortium.

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

Of those parents and carers who responded, the very large majority agreed that they were happy with their child's experience at the school, with an overwhelming majority agreeing that the school kept their child safe. This positive picture is also reflected in the inspection findings. Inspectors confirmed that the school is continuing to develop ways in which the views and concerns of parents and carers can be taken into account.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Highfields Science Specialist 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 281 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1505 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	107	38	160	57	6	2	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	132	47	141	50	3	1	3	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	168	60	108	38	4	1	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	111	40	147	52	19	7	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	91	32	164	58	9	3	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	80	28	169	60	23	8	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	51	18	194	69	24	9	1	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)	117	42	135	48	11	4	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	99	35	161	57	10	4	5	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	109	39	145	52	12	4	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	63	22	179	64	13	5	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	101	36	162	58	2	1	5	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	127	45	141	50	7	2	4	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 all 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



31 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Highfields Science Specialist School, Wolverhampton, WV4 4NT

Thank you for the time many of you took to talk to us. We decided that your school is a good one, as is your sixth form. We also judged that some aspects were outstanding. We were impressed with your positive behaviour and with the high levels of your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. You told us you were proud of your school and this is clear in the excellent contributions you make to the wider school community. You also told us that you think Mr Capel and his colleagues do a good job and make sure that you are given high quality care guidance and support; we agree with you. We found that the curriculum, the teaching and other aspects of the school's work prepare you well for the next stage of your lives.

The majority of teaching you receive is good, some is even better than that. We have asked the school leaders to make sure that all teaching is as good as the best by:

- giving you more opportunities to develop as confident and independent learners.
- making sure there is a consistently high level of challenge right to the end of lessons
- planning activities at the end of lessons to involve you more frequently in reflecting on what you have learned.

You can help by being more willing to answer questions in lessons and taking even more responsibility for your own learning.

Yours sincerely

James McNeillie

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.