

Holmfirth High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107769
Local authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	395666
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2012
Lead inspector	Jacqueline Rothery

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,300
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Taylor
Headteacher	Andy Williams
Date of previous school inspection	15 January 2007
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Additional Inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Additional Inspector

Additional Inspector

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 44 lessons taught by 42 teachers. Three of these lessons were observed jointly with senior members of staff. A further five short observations were conducted to evaluate the quality of provision for targeted groups of students and to observe enrichment activities. Inspectors held meetings with senior staff, middle leaders, members of the governing body and groups of students. They also analysed the questionnaires returned by 291 parents and carers, 160 pupils and 100 staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and considered a range of documentation, including self-evaluation and improvement plans, performance data, minutes of the governing body meetings and safeguarding records. In addition, they scrutinised samples of students' work.

Information about the school

Holmfirth High School is a larger than average secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Most students are of White British heritage and there are few students who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students supported at school action is below average and those supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average. The school draws from a wide area. It is a High-Performing Specialist School with specialisms in Mathematics and Computing, and Applied Learning. It is also a National Support School, has Investors in People Status and National Gold Healthy Schools Award. The school meets the government's current floor standard which sets the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- Holmfirth High School is an outstanding school. It is an ambitious, harmonious learning community which is outward facing and characterised by strong, respectful relationships which support and encourage each individual to reach their full potential.
- Achievement is outstanding. When students join the school their standards of attainment are above average. All groups of students make progress at better than expected rates and they attain very high standards by the end of Key Stage 4. This is underpinned by the extremely well-developed communication skills they gain throughout their time at the school.
- Students benefit from excellent teaching which develops independence, creativity, innovation and risk taking. They are encouraged to think for themselves and explore ideas through a range of challenging activities and tasks which move learning forward at a fast pace. At times, however, teachers miss opportunities to provide detailed feedback to students and also to help them to use their numeracy skills in all subjects.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Students engage respectfully with each other and with adults within a calm, orderly environment. They take responsibility for their own learning and they actively ensure an exceptionally positive, safe climate for learning.
- Leadership and management are excellent at all levels. There is strong drive and ambition, with priorities firmly centred on continuous improvement. Data are used effectively to inform planning in order to further improve the quality of teaching and learning. Self-evaluation is accurate and leads to targeted actions which secure rapid improvements in outcomes. The curriculum offers exceptional opportunities to all students and promotes extensively their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. Performance management systems are robust.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase further the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers use every opportunity to provide detailed feedback to students about the next steps in their learning
 - ensuring that teachers use every opportunity to develop students' use of numeracy skills in all subjects.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

In 2011 attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 was well above average. Current attainment data gathered by the school through its rigorous monitoring and tracking systems indicate that GCSE results this year will show even further gains. From above-average starting points on entry to the school almost all groups of students make outstanding progress. Where progress has been identified as less than rapid, for instance in mathematics and for those students eligible for free school meals, well-focused intervention strategies have secured significant improvements and gaps have been narrowed.

Inspectors observed students making at least good progress in lessons; often it was outstanding. This was evident across a range of subjects and across different key stages. For example, Year 10 students were observed making rapid progress in a science lesson exploring patterns of inheritance; Year 9 students worked with exceptionally high levels of interest and concentration, developing their thinking skills in a geography lesson exploring microclimate; and Year 7 students engaged purposefully and eagerly in a physical education lesson aimed at developing their techniques in relay skills. Students, at all ages and at all levels of ability, are enthusiastic and inquisitive about their learning. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are supported exceptionally well and staff are highly skilled at planning lessons which cater for the needs of every individual.

Communication skills are extremely well developed. Students are confident and keen to extend their knowledge and understanding. They articulate their thoughts and ideas and, in a very natural way, they ask challenging questions of their teachers and of one another. This is a very strong feature of the school. Enthusiastic enquiry, combined with attentive listening, permeates all activities and accelerates the pace of learning. Students are fluent readers and appreciative of the dedicated time the school gives to reading. Inspectors saw extensive evidence of literacy skills being developed across the curriculum, for example in the constant reinforcement of students' accurate use of subject-specific terminology and in the use of well-constructed writing frames and guides to support those students with weaker writing skills.

Almost all parents and carers who responded to Ofsted questionnaires felt strongly that their children are making good progress and are supported in developing their

skills in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Most said that the school meets their children's particular needs. Inspectors' findings support these views.

Quality of teaching

Teaching in both key stages and across most subjects is consistently good and much is outstanding. Parents, carers and students recognise this. Teachers' high expectations of all students and their excellent knowledge and assessment of students' prior attainment are fully reflected in their detailed, incisive planning. Teachers show strong subject knowledge. They are willing to take risks in their teaching strategies, challenging students to think hard and to think differently. Resources are imaginative and used skilfully, and a wide range of information and communication technology is used to enhance teaching. Questioning is sharp and focused, and students' responses are challenged and compared with the thinking of other students. Mostly, teachers offer detailed guidance to students about what they need to do to improve. Disabled students and those with special educational needs are supported well through the high level of subject-specific guidance they are given by their teachers working closely with support staff. Teachers are prepared to adjust plans; they use all their skills, knowledge and resources to ensure that all learners' needs are met.

Students appreciate the quality of teaching. When asked to identify what is unique about their school, a group of Year 9 students responded that 'teachers are passionate about their subjects....because they are passionate, they make lessons fun'. This leads to high levels of student engagement, determination and enthusiasm. They respond to the energy and commitment of their teachers; they enjoy learning, are eager to be successful and are confident that their teachers have high ambitions for them. Consequently, students learn quickly and with high levels of independence. They become confident and resilient learners. For example, in a Year 7 Spanish lesson, through the teacher's brisk pace, excellent use of the target language and staged levels of challenge and difficulty, students were enabled to try out ideas, guess, have fun and, through imaginative activities, rapidly develop and refine their speaking skills in another language. In an art and design lesson a Key Stage 4 student with a statement of special educational needs was fully included in all aspects of the lesson. Careful planning enabled the student's creativity to be given expression and outcomes were exemplary.

Students are encouraged to be reflective and they are given many rich and varied opportunities to explore social, moral and cultural issues in their lessons. For example, in an 'Enrichment' activity one group of Year 8 students was designing a campaign 'against the crime of wastefulness', another was drawing up a 'Manifesto on Vandalism' and a third was preparing a presentation on 'Human Rights'. In each group students were tackling problems independently and then working collaboratively to contribute towards a finished outcome. All discussions included a global dimension, as students began to think about the lives of people in different social and cultural contexts. Such activities contribute significantly to students' exceptional progress in language skills such as discussion, reading and writing. At times, however, opportunities are missed to develop numeracy skills in a similar way across different subjects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents, carers, staff and pupils are highly positive about behaviour and safety. There is very secure and robust use of systems and routines to support, monitor and promote a keen sense of respect for learning, for others and for the school environment. Students are highly positive in their approach to learning. They display extremely high levels of engagement, courtesy and politeness and they are keen to discuss their work and what they enjoy about their school and their learning. In and around school students manage their own behaviour extremely well and help to create a calm, orderly climate for learning. Instances of bullying, of any kind, are rare and students are confident that, should they occur, they will be dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students say that they feel safe in school.

In lessons students typically display exceptionally high levels of cooperation and collaboration. Relationships are exemplary and students treat each other and adults with respect and consideration. They are sensitive to the needs of others and they show a strong awareness of issues of equality and diversity. This, combined with their well-developed communication skills, leads to them making an outstanding contribution to a positive learning environment.

Students are punctual to lessons and attendance rates are consistently above average. Exclusion rates are consistently low.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding. There is no complacency at any level. Self-evaluation is accurate and drives excellent improvement planning. The central focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning has led to what one member of the governing body describes as 'a culture for change and improvement...open to challenge'. Teachers share and extend their knowledge, experience and skills in a number of working groups and networks which help them to keep up to date with developments in subject pedagogy. Professional development and performance management targets are clearly linked. Year-on-year improvements in the quality of teaching have had a positive impact on learning and progress. The school has excellent capacity to secure further improvements.

Excellent planning ensures that students benefit from an outstanding and innovative curriculum which is well matched to the needs of all students and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well. Equality of opportunity is reflected in the range and breadth of courses on offer and in how effectively the school ensures that all groups of students achieve as well as one another and provides support to close any gaps. Almost all students take up further education, employment or training. The taught curriculum is enhanced by a wealth of extra-curricular activities: links and annual trips include Malawi, Peru, China, Paris, Spain and Berlin. There are theatre visits, sports tournaments, music festivals, art exhibitions, computer camps, shows and dance activities, and there are many groups for students to join. The offer is extensive and participation rates are high. This breadth of enrichment, linked with the constant drive to improve achievement, is valued by students, parents and carers, staff and governors alike as seeming 'to

underpin the ethos of the school'; as one parent comments, 'my children have achieved...and they've enjoyed – they are rounded people.'

Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements. In their responses to questionnaires parents and carers indicate overwhelmingly that they would recommend the school to others.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



5 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Holmfirth High School, Holmfirth, HD9 7SE

Thank you for making the inspection team feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We would particularly like to thank those students who spoke with us in meetings and around the school.

Our inspection found that your school is providing you with an outstanding quality of education. You make exceptional progress in most of your subjects and you attain very high standards because of the excellent teaching in your school. We were extremely impressed by your exemplary conduct, the respect and consideration you show towards one another and the enthusiasm with which you approach your learning. Your achievement is outstanding and your willingness to learn makes an exceptional contribution to that success.

All leaders, including the governing body, lead the school exceedingly well. They are ambitious and determined to ensure that you achieve the best you possibly can and they are well supported in this by your teachers. We have asked them to make sure that in their feedback to you your teachers give you clear advice about what you can do to improve even further and that they use every opportunity to help you to develop your numeracy skills in all subjects. We hope that you will play your part in these improvements by continuing to support your school's ambitions for you through working as hard and as enthusiastically as you do now. We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Rothery
Lead Inspector

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