

Hylands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115371
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	338580
Inspection dates	18-19 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Thompson

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	919
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	150
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Ives
Headteacher	Mr David Struthers
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors spent the majority of their time observing learning, visited 31 lessons and observed 31 teachers. Inspectors also held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, looked at school documentation and 228 questionnaires from parents and carers.

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

- the current attainment and progress made by students, including the action taken to improve the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and by boys with white British heritage.
- the effectiveness of the steps taken to improve the quality of teaching.
- the selection of students for entry to the sixth form and the guidance they are given.

Information about the school

Hylands School is a specialist science and mathematics college of average size, on the western outskirts of Chelmsford. Its sixth form is growing, but is smaller than average. Most students are of White British heritage and very few have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average but, within this group, the number of students with a statement of special educational need is high. The school has Investors in People status, the Basic Skills award, Inclusion Mark and Healthy School Award. It offers initial teacher training based in the school. It belongs to a consortium of schools and colleges that provides an alternative vocational programme in Years 10 and 11. The school has its own farm, which provides a rural dimension to its work.

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

3

Main findings

The Hylands School is a satisfactory school, which is improving rapidly. Since the appointment of the headteacher two years ago the school has embarked on a journey of improvement, which is having considerable impact. As a result of improved teaching and the curriculum, the school's academic performance is improving securely and quickly; this year's test and examination results show a marked improvement on those in previous years. The progress made by all students is now satisfactory, and increasing at a rapid pace, including that made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and boys of White British heritage. Attainment is low but improving strongly.

Much has been done to improve the quality of teaching, but the school recognises that more needs to be done to raise it to a consistently good standard. The school is working hard with outside advisers to make further improvements. Where teaching is good, activities are stimulating and successfully secure students' attention and motivation. Nevertheless, a minority of lessons lack this same level of interest, imagination and challenge and, in a few lessons, students lack regular feedback on how they may improve and opportunities to work independently.

The curriculum has improved a good deal and provides a better balance between academic and vocational courses. A valuable range of vocational courses is offered in Years 10 and 11, which lead to accredited qualifications. The school's status as a specialist science and mathematics college has particularly improved learning in science, and the school is now extending the influence of its work in this subject into other subject areas.

The school is working within a local behaviour and attendance partnership to bring about improvement to attendance, and has recently appointed an attendance officer to help with this work, particularly to tackle the persistent absence of a very small minority of students. These strategies have proved successful, to the extent that attendance rose to above average levels earlier in the school year. The impact of 'swine flu', however, and the recent inclement weather took its toll on attendance figures, which are now low. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory, and sometimes good.

Leaders and managers are keen to bring about improvement and their work is proving increasingly successful. Self-evaluation is largely accurate, boosted by improvements to monitoring and the tracking of students' progress. Together with

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the school's increasing effectiveness, these factors show the school has satisfactory capacity for sustaining improvement. The school is aware of some variability in subject leadership and a programme of professional training has been given to raise its effectiveness to a more consistent level. In particular, some departments are still developing the rigour of their self-evaluation and the degree to which they check the implementation of their plans for improvement.

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average as a result of the school's open access policy. While the large majority of students make satisfactory progress, a significant minority progress well and go to universities when they leave school. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory, and sometimes good, underpinned by good assessment. The curriculum offers a satisfactory balance of academic and vocational courses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - making lessons consistently more interesting, imaginative and challenging
 - ensuring students receive regular feedback on how they may improve their work
 - providing students with more opportunity to work independently.
- Make leadership and management more effective by:
 - improving the clarity and accuracy of departmental self-evaluations
 - ensuring that plans to enhance the performance in departments are fully implemented.
- Improve the attendance of the small minority of students who are persistently absent by working closely with the new attendance officer and local partnerships.

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

Many students show good motivation in lessons, and this heightened level of interest has been an important contributory factor in their swiftly increasing progress last year and this. So, too, have improvements to teaching and the curriculum. While it was too soon for improvements to fully influence results at Year 11 last year, and attainment remains low, modular tests and examination results show current scores to be much above those in 2009. These results are significant because, not only are they higher, but they have been achieved by students who entered the school with lower attainment. The progress made by students in the lessons observed was always satisfactory, and sometimes better, especially in English. The progress made

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by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and that of boys with below average attainment on entry to the school, is also satisfactory.

The behaviour of students, both in lessons and around the school, is satisfactory. The students interviewed agreed with this judgement. Permanent exclusions are rare and fixed-term exclusion is not high. The majority of students feel safe in the school and adopt safe practices in lessons. There are very few instances of harassment and bullying, and when they occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively by the staff. Students contribute to the school and wider communities well. They are involved in charitable work, local commercial enterprises and farming through their work on the school farm. They have effective links, through the Essex Partnership, with the province of Jiangsu in China.

All these factors ensure that students are adequately prepared for future life. Students are able to use basic skills in work-related contexts. They benefit from learning about innovation, creativity, and risk-taking in some of the subjects in the curriculum, and all students undertake three weeks of work experience. Students know the difference between right and wrong and use an effective range of social skills when dealing with fellow students and adults. They work willingly and often well in groups in lessons. Most students respect cultural and ethnic diversity and respond with interest to learning about other cultures.

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	4
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	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
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	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	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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How effective is the provision?

The school has worked hard to improve teaching and assessment. Improvements are bearing fruit, and teaching is never less than satisfactory, but its quality remains variable. Most teachers have secure knowledge of their subjects and good relationships with students. The good lessons are interesting, imaginative and engage students of all abilities equally. Teachers inspire students to do their best and provide opportunities for students to work independently. In these lessons, work is assessed well and students know what they have to do to improve. A good variety of teaching methods are used. In some of the satisfactory lessons, teachers tend to lead and direct learning too much, students undertake the same range of work and there are too few opportunities for them to work independently. Assessment is variable and students sometimes receive insufficient regular feedback on how they may improve.

The curriculum has been much improved over the past two years. Effective transitional groups have been formed in Year 7 to boost achievement. The school status as a science and mathematics college has had a good impact on learning, particularly in science. An accelerated programme of learning has been introduced in science to enable Key Stage 3 to be completed in two years, a year earlier than is usual. National Curriculum requirements are met. There is an improved balance of academic and vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11. Vocational courses are offered in environmental and land based studies, information and communication technology, health and social care, and media studies; all of which are giving students a wider choice and greater opportunity to follow their interests. A successful alternative curriculum is also offered in conjunction with a local consortium and now leads to accredited qualifications.

The quality of care, guidance and support is enhanced by a well planned programme to introduce new students to the school and effective intervention to help underachieving students in Year 7. The staff hold regular meetings to ensure the school meets the needs of students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. There are a small number of instances of verbal racism and bullying, but these are quickly and effectively dealt with by the pastoral staff, acting with support from students in the sixth form. The advice and guidance given to students in the sixth form on choice of courses and options has recently been extended, so that students are now better informed. Support for attendance has proved effective more generally, and the school continues its work with those few who have poor attendance.

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	3

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relevant, through partnerships	
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior staff are motivated and focused on achieving improvements. Many new actions have been taken since the headteacher arrived two years ago. Importantly, the quality of teaching, the organisation of the school day, target setting and the curriculum have all been much improved. As a result, expectations have risen and students' learning, progress and attainment are improving securely and quickly. These improvements have, in turn, extended equal opportunities among students. All staff are committed to change and work well together. The system for tracking and monitoring students' performance has been greatly sharpened and enables staff to take timely actions to support underachieving students. The monitoring of teaching has been much improved and now provides an accurate assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in lessons. Target-setting is realistic and motivates both staff and students to improve standards.

The leadership provided by the heads of subject areas varies, but has improved as a result of training. Departmental self-evaluation is undertaken annually, but is not always sufficiently accurate or self-critical to identify the priorities needed to improve. Whilst the heads of subject areas are supported well by the senior staff, the senior leaders do not always monitor closely enough the actions taken by subject leaders to enhance performance in their areas.

Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and support the senior staff well. They are rigorous in ensuring that staff and students are safe and have good procedures to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of students. The governors link with parents and carers well. They support and challenge the school in tackling weaknesses. All statutory requirements are met. The school provides a good cohesive environment. Students play an active part in local activities outside the school and have a good awareness of cultures in other countries.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
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	3

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tackles discrimination	
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

The school's inclusive approach enables students to enter the sixth form with lower numbers of high level grade passes at GCSE than is the norm. Attainment on entry is, as a consequence, below average. The majority of students make satisfactory progress and achieve standards which are below average. A significant minority of students, however, progress well and the large majority go to universities when they leave school.

The sixth form is small and retention rates at the end of Year 12 have been low in the past. However, the school has recently improved guidance to ensure that students select courses more suited to their needs and ability. As a result, most students in Year 13 complete their courses. In the lessons observed, students worked effectively and sought opportunities to improve their learning by working independently. The school has recently developed the curriculum. In addition to a wide range of academic courses, a number of vocational courses at Level 2 in media, health and social care, business studies, child care and animal care have been added; these additions have met the needs of a wider range of students and helped some to improve their learning. Students in the sixth form, including head boy and girl, play a leading role in the school as mentors to younger students. Senior staff have a clear vision of how provision should develop and manage the sixth form satisfactorily on a day-to-day basis.

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

Most parents and carers overwhelmingly support the school. They are strongly supportive of the statements that the school keeps their children safe and that their children enjoy school. A typical supportive statement made by a parent is, 'Both my daughters settled into Hylands very quickly with no problems and are both progressing very well.' A small minority of parents and carers have misgivings about

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the effectiveness with which the school deals with unacceptable behaviour and the help the school gives their children to lead a healthy lifestyle. The inspectors found that on the few occasions when harassment and bullying occurs the staff deal with this quickly and effectively. The school is aware that the time devoted to physical education (PE) in Year 11 is too short and is introducing two periods of PE for this year group in September.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at the Hylands 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 228 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 919 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	44	20	148	65	26	11	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	54	24	152	67	10	4	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	58	25	128	56	27	13	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	58	25	128	56	29	13	4	2
The teaching is good at this school	36	16	139	61	26	11	5	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	44	19	127	56	37	16	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	13	146	64	35	15	5	2
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)	44	19	135	59	23	10	6	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	16	145	63	27	12	6	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	15	134	59	30	13	12	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	11	136	61	33	14	9	4
The school is led and managed effectively	37	16	140	61	20	9	7	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	46	20	143	63	23	10	6	5

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 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 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.



20 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of the Hylands School, Chelmsford, CM1 3DF

My colleagues and I enjoyed our visit to your school and welcomed the opportunity to talk to you and see you in lessons.

Yours is a satisfactory, and rapidly improving, school. You enter the school with knowledge and skills lower than most students of your age. You make satisfactory progress during your time at the school. A significant number of you go to universities when you leave, which is good achievement.

The teachers have worked hard during the past two years to improve your education. They have had good success, but recognise that there is still more to do before the school is working as they would wish. We agree with them and have made some recommendations about what the school needs to do to improve further. We have asked them to improve the leadership and management by improving the clarity and accuracy of some departmental self-evaluations and ensuring that plans to enhance the performance of departments are fully implemented. We have asked them to improve teaching by making lessons more consistently interesting, imaginative and challenging; ensuring that you receive regular feedback on how you can improve your work; and providing you with more opportunities to work independently. We have also asked that they improve attendance, particularly of the few of you who are too often absent from school.

You can help them achieve these improvements by attending your school regularly and always seeking to do your best work.

My best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Peter Thompson
Lead Inspector

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