

Hitchin Boys' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117502
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358149
Inspection dates	2–3 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1015
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Slater
Headteacher	Martin Brown
Date of previous school inspection	20 May 2008
School address	Grammar School Walk Hitchin SG5 1JB
Telephone number	01462 432181
Fax number	01462 440172
Email address	admin@hbs.herts.sch.uk

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 44 lessons taught by 43 different teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and members of the school's staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and scrutinised a wide range of documents including those relating to safeguarding and students' performance data. In addition, questionnaires were analysed from 288 parents and carers, as well as those returned by students and staff.

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

- The progress made by different groups of learners.
- How well teaching is adapted to take into account the range of abilities in classes.
- The extent to which the marking of students' work, the use of questions in lessons and students' performance data are used to ensure that all groups of students are making good progress.

Information about the school

The school is of average size. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average, and the proportion who are from minority ethnic groups, including those who speak English as an additional language, is in line with the national average. The proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational needs, is well below average.

The school is part of a three-school consortium for its sixth form provision. A proportion of the students from all three schools study on other schools' sites. It is a hub school for extended services. The school's specialisms are modern foreign languages and technology. The headteacher took up his post in September 2010.

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

This is a good school. The quality of teaching is good, students have mature attitudes to their work, attendance is high and leaders make good use of assessment data to identify and support students who are falling behind in their work. As a result, students make good progress. These strengths are a result of good leadership and management and of strong oversight of the school by the governing body.

The school provides a calm, purposeful learning environment. Behaviour in lessons is good. Students' evident interest in their work, as well as their desire to learn, plays an important role in their academic progress. Lessons almost always engage the interest of students because of the wide variety of approaches to learning that are used. This in turn reflects teachers' own good knowledge, confidence in their teaching and interest in their subjects. No inadequate teaching was seen. Lessons are helpfully resourced: students have regular access to information from books as well as from the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Good opportunities for students to share their knowledge and thinking with each other in discussions contribute to their good learning. This compensates to some extent for the variability in the use of assessment information, including from the marking of students' work and their answers to questions in class, to ensure that learners of all abilities are fully supported and challenged in lessons. However, the weaknesses in assessment mean that the small proportion of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making satisfactory rather than good progress, though it is improving. Those who need the most support make good progress. Students who are from minority ethnic groups also make good progress. Learning is good in the sixth form, where the lessons observed were almost all of good or outstanding quality.

The curriculum provides a good range of subjects and types of course, in both the main school and sixth form. It is designed well to provide interest and challenge to all abilities. The range of extra-curricular activities is good, and includes academic clubs as well as sporting opportunities.

After the last inspection there was a decline in students' attainment and progress. Since then there has been steady improvement, and this is continuing. Both attainment and progress have risen significantly. Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate and is used well to identify areas for improvement. As a result, some other aspects of the school's work have also been recently strengthened. For example, attendance is now high and subject leaders are held more effectively to account for their work

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by senior leaders and the governing body. The school's capacity for sustained improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make at least good progress by making sure that teaching takes into account the differences in students' knowledge and understanding, gained from:
 - the marking of students' classwork and homework
 - the answers students give to questions designed to check understanding during lessons
 - the analysis of formal assessments of their learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students' attainment when they join the school is above average. In 2010 a significantly higher than average proportion achieved a high-grade GCSE pass in a modern foreign language and at least two higher-grade passes in science. Pass rates in technology subjects are above average. In English and mathematics, attainment is also above average. Both attainment and the progress students make are improving year on year. The school's assessment of their attainment is accurate and current data, including the GCSE results for those who took examinations in Year 10, show that there have been further improvements to students' progress this year. In lessons, good learning was observed in all subjects. Learning is facilitated in a range of ways, including through group work and individual study. Students say that they enjoy learning most when there is an active or practical element and this is corroborated by inspectors' observations. Students who have a statement of special educational needs and those who the school has identified as requiring additional support in lessons do well because the quality of focused support they receive is good. Other students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not always specifically catered for in teachers' planning, and so the work set is sometimes slightly too hard for them.

Students enjoy school. They say that they feel safe and that behaviour is good, but report some boisterousness on occasions at entrances to the buildings. Behaviour around the school site is otherwise sensible, however. Students are articulate and speak confidently and politely to adults. They report little bullying and are clear about who they should turn to if they have any concerns. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being because they reach above average standards in their work and are adept at working in groups as well as individually. They are proficient in their use of information and communication technology (ICT). Most of the older students receive guidance on matters of finance.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning**2**

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

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

How effective is the provision?

The great majority of teaching is good or better. No inadequate teaching was observed during the inspection and the school's own accurate monitoring suggests that there is none. It is characterised by good teacher knowledge, a good pace of work, a good variety of learning approaches and generally good challenge. Teachers help students well to understand what is required of them in their work, often by discussing the grading criteria. There is some inconsistency, however, in the helpfulness and frequency of book marking. In addition, some of the students who make faster than expected progress towards their targets do not have their targets revised when they have achieved them. As a result, they are not always sure what they need to do to improve further.

The curriculum provides well for the interests and aspirations of the students. It includes a modern foreign language for all, but also a range of diplomas. The school makes good use of external providers where this will improve the offer available.

Care, guidance and support are good. Students speak well of the approach the school takes to preparing them for entry in Year 7. Similar comments are made about the transition to Years 10 and 11 and to the sixth form. This is effective: students in Year 7 are making good progress in their work, for example. The effectiveness of the work to improve attendance is outstanding. There are also some areas where the support for individuals who have had difficulties has been of very good quality. For those students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who receive it, support is good. Well-attended family learning sessions are provided.

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

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

There is clear ambition for further improvement. The headteacher has monitored the school's provision and has accurately identified areas for development. The governing body is ambitious, well organised and knowledgeable. It has established clear expectations about the progress it expects students to make and is approaching its work with rigour. Subject leaders are well informed and some carry out exemplary analyses of students' work in order to identify where improvements to teaching approaches are required. Very good use has been made of partners to bring about improvement to these areas. The school's engagement with parents and carers has shown improvement and is now good. There are now termly reports on students' progress, for example, enabling parents to ascertain areas where students may require more support. The school's website, which contains information of use to parents and carers, shows that most parents and carers access it. Partnerships are highly effective. For example, the sixth form arrangements offer students a very wide curriculum and enable them to make good progress in their learning. Partnerships with other providers enable a broad curriculum to be offered to Years 10 and 11. The approach to target setting has been amended this year and the expectations of students' progress have increased as a result.

Safeguarding is good. Procedures are followed correctly and the governing body ensures that the relevant policies are updated. A very high proportion of students and their parents and carers say that students are safe at the school. The promotion of equality is good. This is brought about by the breadth of the curriculum and shown in the school's recent work to improve the performance of those who were of average or below attainment when they joined the school, which had been lagging. The school's leaders have analysed the characteristics of the local community very well, evaluated the school's provision and this has informed highly effective planning. There are extended opportunities for a range of work related to community cohesion, involving local, national and international links. The school's position as a hub for extended services plays an important part in this work. There is very good support for students from minority ethnic groups and relationships between different groups in the school are also very good.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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	2
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 in the sixth form are making good progress in their work, after a dip in 2010. Teaching is good and leaders monitor its quality regularly. They also check students' progress and intervene effectively when it is insufficient. Good evaluation of the progress that students make is being used well to identify which students are likely to underachieve so that interventions can be arranged. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they make use of effective questioning that develops students' analytical skills well. The curriculum is extensive, as a result of students being able to study across three different schools and a variety of other providers. All sixth form students make a contribution to the school, for example by helping younger students in their learning. Care, guidance and support are robust, and students' punctuality and attendance to lessons delivered by partners are monitored and reported back rapidly. There is a good induction programme, as a result of which students have a clear understanding of the demands that will be placed on them. The proportion of students who continue their learning into Year 13 is above average.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
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

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

Parents and carers are very supportive of the school's work. A small minority raised concerns are about how well the school helps them to support their child's learning, and about communications with the school. Inspectors investigated these areas and their judgments are provided elsewhere in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Hitchin Boys' 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 288 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1015 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	117	41	144	50	21	7	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	112	39	170	59	5	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	80	28	181	63	21	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	87	30	164	57	20	7	7	2
The teaching is good at this school	86	30	181	63	12	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	54	19	161	56	58	20	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	62	22	183	64	24	8	2	1
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)	74	26	166	58	15	5	3	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	85	30	168	58	19	7	6	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	85	30	160	56	26	9	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	65	23	158	55	28	10	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	91	32	173	60	7	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	123	43	141	49	13	5	2	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	36	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.



4 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Hitchin Boys' School, Hitchin, SG5 1JB

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school. We spoke to many of you in lessons, around the school and in meetings. We were impressed by your confidence and politeness. Thank you also to those of you who completed the questionnaires. These showed that a very large majority of you learn a lot in lessons, know how well you are doing and feel safe in school. Inspectors agree with these views. You make good progress in your learning and reach high standards because the teaching you receive is of good quality, because you are interested in what you are learning and because your attendance is high. You behave well in lessons, and around the school.

Your school takes care over its preparations for when you join in Year 7 as well as at other times of change, for example when you are preparing to go into Year 10 or the sixth form. As a result you get off to a good start. The curriculum is good. There is a wide range of subjects and courses to ensure that you are well served, whatever your interest and aspirations. There is also a good range of extra-curricular activities.

The progress you make in your work is good. A small number of you make satisfactory progress. To ensure that all students make at least good progress we have asked teachers to take further steps to ensure that lessons are always designed to take into account the knowledge and understanding of different students. This should come partly from the marking of your classwork and homework, and from checking your understanding more frequently in lessons.

You can help by making sure you understand the work and asking for help if you do not.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector

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