

Heathside School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125309
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	315233
Inspection dates	5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Robin Hammerton (HMI)

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
Number on roll	
School	1303
Sixth form	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Clr I Lake
Principal	Dr G Willoughby
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
School address	Brooklands Lane Weybridge KT13 8UZ
Telephone number	01932 846162
Fax number	01932 828142

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector, with administrative support. Inspectors evaluated directly the overall effectiveness of the school, along with aspects of:

- teaching and learning
- the curriculum
- the sixth form
- child protection and safeguarding
- provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD)
- leadership and management
- students' achievement and their personal development and well-being.

Inspectors talked to students, staff, and governors. They observed the school at work, visiting lessons, an assembly, tutor periods and break times. They also scrutinised school documents, parental questionnaires and students' work. In other aspects, the school provided evaluations, which inspectors considered and accepted, as there was no evidence that these were not justified.

Description of the school

Heathside is a larger than average school with specialist technology status. It selects one tenth of its intake on the basis of aptitude in music, sport or science and technology. Most students come from nearby but a significant minority travel to the school from other parts of Surrey. The students' attainment on joining the school, whilst mixed, is significantly above average overall. A small proportion of students come from minority ethnic minority backgrounds. A lower than average proportion of students is identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is part of the Elmbridge 14-19 consortium which exists to provide a wide range of courses.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a very good and improving school. Students thoroughly enjoy being at Heathside and standards are exceptionally high in most subjects. Students' progress is consistently good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and excellent in the outstanding sixth form.

The school's success begins with the principal. He sees clearly the strengths and potential of his staff and others, such as governors. He then ensures these people are empowered and motivated, with very good opportunities for professional and personal development. This enables staff to undertake their responsibilities, which are clearly defined, with energy and creativity, knowing they will be well supported and encouraged. They are also held appropriately accountable. A thoughtful and research-based approach to development pervades the school. This leads to initiatives, such as a new programme to support potentially vulnerable students in Years 7 and 8, being reflectively trialled and evaluated.

The school's self-evaluation is excellent. It is well focused, candid and accurate. It leads directly into the school's good improvement planning, which is well prioritised and linked to staff performance management procedures. However, some improvements in the school are not planned in sufficient detail or with sharp enough measures of progress. This makes success harder to achieve. For example, staff have identified the need to improve specific aspects of students' writing but, whilst hard work is going into it, the strategies to achieve this are not clearly enough planned. Overall, however, the school's well-developed management processes and its committed staff team give it very good capacity to continue to improve at a time of change. Two new vice-principals were appointed within the last year; both make strong contributions, as do other senior staff. The principal is due to retire this year and recruitment of his successor by governors is underway. The well-organised governing body, which has a newly appointed chair, makes an outstanding contribution. Its members are astute and knowledgeable. They support and challenge the school very well, contributing much to its success.

These strengths of leadership and management lead to a happy school with high standards and good progress by all groups of students. Key Stage 3, GCSE and A level results are extremely high. Students' skills in information and communication technology (ICT) are good, and applied well across the curriculum, which befits the school's technology status. This specialist status also makes a strong impact on whole-school development. However, standards in English have fallen recently in Key Stage 3 and, whilst they are more steady at Key Stage 4, have not reflected national improvements. In mathematics, standards are stable but not quite as good as those in most other subjects. Students' attainment in these subjects, nevertheless, remains well above the national average, as should be expected given the school's intake. The school tracks students' achievement carefully and sets challenging academic targets. As a result, it clearly recognises the need to improve this situation. The school is also rightly aiming for some higher attaining students to attain even better grades or levels in a range of subjects than in the past.

Students enjoy a good and motivating curriculum, although it has not yet been refined sufficiently to address the need for improvement in English and mathematics. Students have a wide range of academic and vocational options, with innovative aspects, such as the new A level in critical thinking. Many options at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are made possible by the Elmbridge consortium. Other external partnerships support the school in providing a varied and popular range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. These include visits out, eco-school projects, a variety of sporting events, and many musical groups and productions. A quarter of students take instrumental lessons. In preparing its guidance for all secondary schools, the School Food Trust has made a film of the successful whole-school approach adopted by Heathside in meeting national nutrient-based standards in its catering. However, although their

knowledge of healthy eating is good, some students continue to choose less healthy snack options, a few of which are available from the school canteen. The specific provision for students identified as having a particular gift or talent is good and much appreciated by them. Equally, students with disabilities or other particular needs have any special requirements met sensitively and well, so most make good progress.

Teaching is consistently very good and is excellent in the sixth form. Lessons are well planned and paced with students often having good opportunities to participate actively. Staff use many teaching techniques very well but some methods which might help enhance students' progress further, and make it outstanding, are used less. For example, students have few opportunities to mark or assess their own or each other's work, to help them focus even more closely on what they need to learn. Although they know their targets, students are not always sure of their next learning steps, despite the helpful feedback they receive from teachers verbally and through marking.

Students' personal development, behaviour and attitudes to learning are good, although a few parents have some concerns about poor behaviour and the number of short-term exclusions is significant. Inspectors observed generally very good behaviour but also came across isolated examples of inappropriate language being used and boisterousness by some students outside lessons. Students know the consequences of poor behaviour and say that the school's behaviour policy is consistently and fairly applied. They are aware of some bullying, though they say it is quite rare and very well dealt with by staff if it takes place. Parents generally agree. Relationships between adults and students are excellent. The staff know the students very well and care for them superbly. Students receive excellent and often personalised pastoral, academic and career guidance. They feel very well prepared for next stages of education or employment. Students' moral, cultural and social development is very good, although, during the inspection, their opportunities for spiritual development in assemblies and tutorial periods were less so.

Students are very positive about their school. So are the vast majority of parents. However, some parents feel communications from the school could be better, although the school provides regular newsletters and has an informative website, giving helpful information about school events and policies. The school council works effectively, making some important decisions. Systems where trained students act as mentors for other students, and as mediators, are well established. Students feel their voice is heard and that they can all make suggestions and contributions that are valued. They really enjoy coming to school, as shown by their willingness to learn, care for each other, and their above-average attendance.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form standards are very high and students' progress in their courses is rapid. Last year, almost all students who applied to university gained their first choice. Their excellent academic achievement reflects their personal growth into mature and responsible young adults, partly brought about by the excellent care, guidance and support they receive. As one put it, 'Teachers are really supportive; they really care about each of us doing well.' Sixth formers make an excellent contribution to the community both within the school and beyond, for example by providing mentoring support to younger students. The teaching they receive is knowledgeable and very well matched to their needs. Students contribute in lessons confidently and productively. The range of course options is extensive, as is the provision of enrichment activities. Many students travel abroad for both study and personal challenge. The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent, leading to a strong, purposeful learning community, which includes students, staff, parents and visitors to the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve some aspects of teaching further so that students are involved more closely in assessing their own and each other's work, to ensure that they know more precisely how well they are doing and what the next learning steps are.
- Plan more robustly to improve students' progress in English and mathematics.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

18 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Heathside School, Weybridge, KT13 8UZ

Thank you very much for the way you made us welcome when we came to inspect your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting and talking with many of you. You were excellent ambassadors for your school, honestly telling us what you thought and showing us what you were learning.

We were not in the school for long but, while we were there, we found out a great deal. This letter is to tell you what we thought. You told us that you go to a really good school, and we agree. Exam and test results at Key Stage 3, GCSE and in the sixth form are very high. You make good progress in your courses, and excellent progress in the sixth form, because you work hard and the teaching is mainly very good. You have a good range of subjects and choices available when you are older. The staff give you excellent advice and guidance about your options, or if you have any personal needs. Dr Willoughby, the staff and governors do a very good job in leading the school. It was great to see how many of you join in with clubs and activities of all sorts, including sports and musical events. In fact, many of you were preparing for a production when we came, which I hope went well.

We made two main suggestions to help the school become even better. The first one is to ask your teachers to get you even more involved with assessing your own work and being very clear about what you need to do to improve it. Sometimes it is good to work with a partner or in groups when doing this, to share ideas and see what others have done. The second recommendation is needed because progress in English and mathematics has recently not been as fast as most other subjects. We have asked the school to plan to improve this. Important work is going on to improve writing in the school, including the use of good grammar. You can help by working hard (of course!) and being sure you know what is expected, and all of your targets.

I wish you all every success in the future and, particularly, good luck to everyone who has important examinations coming up this summer.

With best wishes

Robin Hammerton
Her Majesty's Inspector