

The North Halifax Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107574
Local authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	356185
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2011
Reporting inspector	John Peckham HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
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	1,142
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	363
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqueline Kershaw
Headteacher	Graham Maslen
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. A total of 46 part-lessons taught by 44 teachers were observed and meetings were held with groups of students, staff and a member of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documents related to the learning, behaviour, care and guidance of students as well as the school's relationships with parents and carers and the wider community. Inspectors also considered the views expressed in 585 parents' questionnaires, 173 pupils' questionnaires and 67 from the school staff.

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

- The progress of students from Year 7 to the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form, in relation to their high prior attainment.
- The extent to which the teaching meets the needs of all students, by providing:
 - suitable challenge for all ability levels
 - an appropriate range of learning activities and approaches to allow for prior learning, progress and learning styles.
- The effectiveness of teachers' use of assessment to promote the highest levels of achievement.

Information about the school

The North Halifax Grammar School is a larger than average 11–18 selective school located on the northern boundary of Halifax. It draws students from a wide area and a large number of primary schools. The proportion of students attending the school known to be eligible for free school meals is much lower than the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is also much lower than the national average. A small proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school was designated a high-performing specialist school in 2009, with a main specialism in science and a second specialism in modern languages. The school has achieved a number of awards including Investors in People, the Artsmark, Healthy School status, Eco-Schools Silver Award and intermediate International Schools Award.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The students of this school bring with them a record of high attainment in their previous schools and a strong desire to learn. Their outstanding behaviour, supported by a calm, studious and very caring school environment enables them to achieve results in their examinations at GCSE and A level which are significantly above the national averages. Inspectors noted many occasions where students' thoughtful behaviour made an outstanding contribution to the learning taking place in classrooms. Students quickly focused on tasks, responded promptly to requests from their teachers and were very willing to support the learning of others. Attendance and punctuality are excellent.

The school provides an outstanding curriculum, well suited to the abilities of the students. It is also successful in creating a supportive and nurturing environment for students. There are effective arrangements to help the induction of students joining the school in Year 7 and those who enter the sixth form from other schools. Students feel very safe and well supported and are confident that the school will deal effectively with bullying or other concerns. The school has also developed very specific ways to support the needs of its students, such as the highly effective use of sixth-form mentors to assist learning. There are tailored study support programmes for students who feel under academic pressure. The progress of students from all backgrounds is good, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has appropriate policies and procedures to promote equality.

The headteacher provides strong and consistent leadership for the school. He and other leaders are aware that even though students attain well, their progress could be even better, particularly in achieving the highest grades. As a result, the school has made teaching and learning a priority and has taken actions which are showing impact in improved performance. In English, for example, the percentage of students obtaining the highest grades at GCSE has increased from 46 to 71 per cent over the last three years and more students are choosing to study the subject at Advanced level. There has also been a marked increase in the number of students progressing to the most demanding universities, which is helping to raise the aspirations and attainment of sixth-form students.

Leaders recognise, however, that there is more to be done to ensure that the quality of all teaching and learning in the school matches that of the best. There is inconsistency in the quality of teachers' planning, in the effectiveness with which

assessment of progress is used to shape learning and in the extent to which teachers are making best use of the exceptional learning skills of the students. In the sixth form, a few Year-12 students are not sufficiently well prepared by the school for the difference between GCSE and A-level courses. There is also variation in the progress that students make in different subjects at A level.

Action to improve the school since the last inspection has been effective, although in relation to improving all teaching and learning, has not been as rapid as it could have been in all subjects. There are, however, many examples of outstanding teaching and learning, and evidence of good impact where leaders and managers have taken decisive action to improve. There is an effective programme of staff development and performance management; as a result, the school's capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

School leaders should:

- Increase the proportion of students attaining the highest grades at GCSE and A level.
- Raise the quality of teaching in all subjects to match the best practice in the school by:
 - improving teachers' use and understanding of assessment to support learning
 - planning better, to allow for the different needs of students in each lesson
 - increasing the range of learning approaches, including the use of discussion and independent enquiry.
- Improve the progress of students in the sixth form by:
 - providing more effective preparation for A-level study at the start of Year 12
 - reducing the variation in the progress that students make in different subjects.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enjoy their learning and this is reflected in their outstanding achievement. Attainment is high and has been significantly above average over the last three years. Students gain good GCSE results in the school's specialist subjects of science and modern languages. Not all students with the highest levels of attainment at Key Stage 2, however, gain an A* or A grade at GCSE. In 2010, the proportion that gained A* or A in English increased significantly. This was due to a change in staffing, more active learning in lessons, a new GCSE course and additional time for English in the curriculum. The progress students make in gaining five GCSEs at grades A*–C including English and mathematics is better than expected, and is good.

Students are well motivated, keen and cooperative. They aspire to do well at school and to achieve. Inspectors observed students writing with skill, with purpose and being articulate in their spoken contributions to lessons. They are confident to offer

ideas and explanation. The very few students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least good progress and achieve well.

Most students feel safe in school and this view is supported by their parents and carers. They are confident that bullying is rare and that the school will deal appropriately with any concerns that they raise. Students from across the school are well prepared to face the range of issues that may affect their safety and well-being. They understand how to use the internet safely, about sexual health and substance abuse. Students have high expectations of their own conduct and frequently go beyond what is asked of them to make contributions that promote good learning for everyone. This focused and studious atmosphere has been developed through the implementation of a 'Behaviour for Learning' policy since the last inspection. This initiative promotes a climate where there is good communication between students and staff and issues can be resolved through discussion.

Students were crucial in helping the school to achieve the national Healthy School status in 2009. There are good options for healthy eating and the participation in physical activity is high. Students know how to be healthy and have high expectations; perhaps due to this, a third of students and some parents and carers believe that the school could do more to promote a healthy lifestyle. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. They are mature young citizens, keen to be involved in decision making. Their perceptive understanding of the different points of view represented in negotiating, was demonstrated in a recent change to the school rules on make-up. Students play an active role in local primary schools and many sixth formers take on mentoring roles to help younger students with their learning. Their awareness of the wider local, national and international community is supported by well-planned courses in subjects such as religious studies and history.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
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	1
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	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹The 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 quality of teaching overall is good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are able to generate enthusiasm and interest in their subjects. In lessons where teaching is at its best, learning proceeds at a brisk pace with appropriate levels of challenge. There is effective use of resources including information and communication technology. In a history lesson, for example, students used photographs and paintings to gain an insight into varying points of view and in an A-level psychology lesson, a short but powerful extract from a documentary was used. Students are encouraged to work independently and in a variety of styles. In some less effective lessons, however, there is an over-reliance on teacher-led and dominated activities, with insufficient opportunities for students to deepen their interest and understanding through discussion, questioning, explaining and justifying. There are many cases where the marking of student's work is thorough, providing insightful comments on how students can improve although some marking is cursory and infrequent.

The school has adapted its curriculum creatively, making it well suited to the needs of high-achieving students. This supports their outstanding outcomes. The core curriculum means that all students can study a broad range of subjects to GCSE, keeping open the maximum number of options beyond school. Students in Key Stage 3 may study up to three languages, including Latin. In Key Stage 4, new courses such as astronomy, psychology and geology have been added to broaden the range of subjects available. In the sixth form, the exclusively academic curriculum is also suitable for the needs of the students, many of whom choose to progress to demanding and competitive university courses. Cross-curricular provision for the development of literacy and numeracy is good and the use of information and communication technology in all subjects is improving.

The school has established partnerships to provide interesting sports options at Key Stage 4, introducing students to activities and facilities beyond school which will be useful in adult life. Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are extensive, wide-ranging and valued by the students; participation rates are high. Students were intrigued, for example, when an Enigma machine was brought to school. They learned how it worked and the impact it had on the course of the Second World War. Students and their parents and carers have commented on the powerful and memorable experiences provided to all Year 8 students in a week-long visit to Normandy. Students also valued the wide range of other activities available beyond school, including excellent music, sports clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

The care, guidance and support of students have been enhanced by a recent change made to keep form tutors with their groups for longer, and this development has been widely appreciated by students and parents. Continuity is improved and the better monitoring of progress helps timely intervention. It also ensures that excellent attention can be targeted to support students at times of pressure or where difficulties beyond school are affecting their health or well-being. Responding to the views of parents and carers, changes have also been made to the induction procedures for Year 7.

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	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They can demonstrate the impact of actions taken to improve the outcomes for students, such as the recent rise in the English results at GCSE, and the significant increase in sixth-form students gaining places at the most prestigious universities. Systems for tracking and monitoring the progress of students have developed well. Staff at all levels are now much more skilled in interpreting attainment data to set appropriately challenging targets for students. Ambition to further raise standards and drive forward improvement in the school is now well established across all levels of leadership in the school, but has still to make its full impact on all teachers. Whilst there is an effective programme of professional development and some good examples of coaching, improvement in teaching and learning was initially slow following the last inspection. The governing body has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has an appropriate range of skills.

Most procedures for the safeguarding of students in school are good. Appropriate checks are made before the appointment of staff and the school has effective policies, including good risk assessment procedures for residential visits. Inspectors identified a weakness in safety procedures in technology and the school acted promptly to rectify it. Issues noted in the last inspection report relating to the development of equality policies have been addressed, and the school is now good at tackling discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. Leaders and managers understand their local community well and provide good support for community cohesion. They enable students to learn about different cultures and religions and build positive attitudes to diversity. The school could, however, do more to promote direct experience of the religious and ethnic differences represented within the wider locality.

These are the grades for the 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	1
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Achievement in the sixth form is good. Most students progress to higher education, and over the last three years the proportion going to Russell Group universities has increased markedly. The progress made from GCSE to A level, however, has been broadly satisfactory due to variation in performance in a few subjects and some underachievement by middle-ability students. The new leadership in the sixth form has improved the systems of monitoring and support of students' academic progress. The effectiveness of the new systems is shown by the improved and now good progress by students at AS level in 2010. School assessment indicates that the same students in the current Year 13 are continuing to make good progress.

Curricular changes have resulted in improved performance in a few subjects, but there is still variation in the performance between subjects at A level. Learning in lessons is good, attendance is high and students are punctual to their lessons. Students make a strong contribution to the school and develop their leadership and management skills through their work as prefects, and in assisting in teaching and learning activities with younger students. Many develop their enterprise skills through business activities in helping to run school events. They benefit well from the opportunities to gain work experience, which develops their knowledge and understanding of their prospective career.

Teaching and assessment are good. In the best lessons, planning focuses precisely on the stage that students have reached in their learning. Questioning is used well to challenge individuals, promote dialogue, and develop subject knowledge and understanding. Marking provides detailed and constructive feedback. At the beginning of Year 12, a few students do not make rapid enough progress in understanding how to write essays or answer questions that meet A-level expectations. The school, however, has identified the need to improve the students' induction in study skills. The academic curriculum provides an extensive range of courses that meet students' needs and interests. The well-planned programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education prepares students very effectively for life beyond school. Students have good opportunities to do a variety of

enrichment activities. They receive effective guidance which enables them to move on successfully to the next stage of education, training or employment. Pastoral support ensures that individual needs are met well.

The new leaders of the sixth form have an accurate assessment of the strengths and areas for development and are proactive in tackling weaknesses. They analyse student progress rigorously, supported by new data systems and more frequent monitoring against challenging targets. This is contributing to accelerating rates of progress. Students' meeting of deadlines is monitored well to ensure that they are making good use of independent study time. Leaders are developing an increasingly systematic and rigorous approach to planning and evaluation. Students have confidence in the sixth-form leaders. They feel they can voice any concerns and close contact is maintained with parents. Initiatives to improve outcomes for students are, however, comparatively recent and have not yet had a sustained impact.

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

A very large number of parents and carers returned the parental questionnaires and their views were overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. In many cases, parents of students at North Halifax Grammar School were much more positive than in most other schools. A small number of parents made extended comments, many of these illustrating the strengths of the school.

There were also a small number of comments regarding some variability in teaching. Inspectors looked carefully at the quality of teaching across the school to investigate these concerns and have included their findings in the key recommendations.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The North Halifax Grammar 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 585 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,142 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	273	47	283	48	21	4	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	302	52	274	47	5	1	1	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	328	56	243	42	10	2	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	297	51	255	44	23	4	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	285	49	281	48	13	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	181	31	303	52	79	14	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	149	25	353	60	59	10	5	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)	268	46	261	45	22	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	269	46	277	47	29	5	2	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	267	46	273	47	20	3	2	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	172	29	299	51	43	7	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	336	57	237	41	8	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	360	62	204	35	15	3	1	0

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 is 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.



21 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The North Halifax Grammar School, Halifax, HX2 9SU

Thank you for the warm welcome that you offered me and the rest of the inspection team and for your willing and helpful cooperation with all our activities.

We were greatly impressed by your positive attitude to learning and the thoughtful and considerate behaviour that you showed in lessons and around the school. We noticed many occasions where your behaviour made an outstanding contribution to the learning taking place in classrooms; you quickly focused on tasks, responded promptly to requests from your teachers and were very willing to support the learning of others. Your attendance and punctuality are outstanding. There are excellent opportunities for learning provided in the school and outstanding care, guidance and support. You join the school having already attained well, and most of you make good progress at GCSE and at A level. All of these factors contribute to your outstanding achievement.

The school provides an outstanding curriculum, well suited to your abilities. It is also successful in creating a caring and nurturing environment for you. You told us that you feel safe, well supported, and are confident that the school will deal effectively with bullying or other concerns. We were also very impressed with the ways in which many of you help others, and this was well illustrated by the excellent work of the sixth-form mentors.

Your headteacher provides strong and consistent leadership for the school. He and other leaders agree with us that many of you could achieve even higher grades. You told us (and we agree) that you enjoy learning best and make the most progress when you can be actively involved in your own learning. In the best lessons, we saw you learn in a variety of ways and you were able to discuss your work, explain it to others and engage in questioning and justifying opinions. We believe that you could benefit from more opportunities to learn in these ways. As a result, we have asked the school to make some improvements.

We believe that your school leaders should:

- Increase the proportion of students attaining the highest grades at GCSE and A level.
- Raise the quality of teaching in all subjects to match the best practice in the school by:

-
- improving teachers' use and understanding of assessment to support learning
 - planning better, to allow for the different needs of students in each lesson
 - increasing the range of learning approaches, including the use of discussion and independent enquiry.
- Improve the progress of students in the sixth form by:
- providing more effective preparation for A-level study at the start of Year 12
 - reducing the variation in the progress that students make in different subjects.

Thank you again for your welcome and the contribution that so many of you make to your school and to others. I wish you the best in your studies and examinations, and for those of you ready to move on beyond the school, best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Peckham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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