

Thistley Hough High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124441
Local Authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	328141
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Davinder Dosanjh HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of students	11–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	853
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gill Miller
Headteacher	Rob Haines
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2006

School address	Newcastle Lane Penkhull Stoke-on-Trent ST4 5JJ
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Telephone number	01782 418500
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average sized school, with the social deprivation figure exceeding the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average, as is the number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Around 84% of the school population is White British, with 11% of Pakistani heritage. Thirty students have joined the school in different year groups who are at early stages of learning English, mainly from Eastern European backgrounds. The school gained specialist status for media and visual arts in 2007 and is an extended school with a unit for hearing impaired students. The current headteacher has been in post for 18 months. At the time of his appointment he was the fifth headteacher in the school in just five years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

While the school provides a satisfactory quality of education, there are an increasing number of good aspects. Thistley Hough has continued to make a journey of significant improvement. The school is going through a number of exciting changes which have started to make a real difference. This is an inclusive school where students receive outstanding care. The school has many strategies in place to ensure that vulnerable students are particularly well cared for by a highly committed staff team. The personal development of students is good. Students enjoy school and there are good relationships between staff and students and amongst students themselves. The Gener8 dance group and DVD project on antisocial behaviour are excellent examples of the good student contribution to the local community and both projects have received national recognition. Behaviour is good, although attendance, while improving, is still below the national average. Too many students are not sufficiently punctual to lessons.

Achievement is satisfactory overall, with a continued trend of improvement. The school achieved its best ever results at GCSE in 2008, with 61% of students obtaining five A* to C grades. Performance is strong in most of the core subjects and specialist subjects. However, there remain inconsistencies, with a few subjects whose performance remains weak. A combination of factors account for the success in 2008. The curriculum is dynamic and better meets the needs of students with more vocational subjects. Vocational subjects such as health and social care, art and information and communication technology (ICT) are now a strength of the school. The school provides a very good mix of modern and traditional subjects. Alongside the more appropriate curriculum have been a number of effective intervention strategies such as mentoring and additional sessions after school and during holidays. There is a rigorous tracking process in place to monitor the progress of individual students. It is particularly strong in mathematics and science, where the progress made by students in Key Stage 4 is now good.

The school's specialism of media and visual arts contributes significantly to raising students' confidence and aspirations and, as a result, assists in raising overall standards. In particular, the students' artwork inspires many, and gives the school a sense of pride and creativity. However, the school acknowledges that the specialism is not yet fully integrated across the curriculum and thus is not being used to raise attainment in all subjects.

Teaching and learning are good, with an increasing number of outstanding lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and students' attitudes to learning are very positive. Lesson intentions are explained clearly at the start of lessons and good use is made of a range of learning activities. In a minority of lessons, students are not always engaged by the activities or tasks set and the lessons do not provide enough challenge.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and direction, as is shown by the clear priorities set by the school and significant rise in standards since his appointment. There is a relentless drive to raise achievement. Students comment that he is visible around the school and they particularly like the headteacher commendations. He is well supported by a strong senior team and an increasingly

effective team of middle leaders. However, there remains too much inconsistency between the best and weakest departments. There is a culture of accountability across the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve punctuality and attendance.
- Improve the performance in weaker subjects by sharing good practice across departments.
- Integrate the specialism across the curriculum so it is used to raise attainment more widely.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged to be satisfactory, but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next Section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are below average. As a result of good progress in some subjects, such as mathematics and science, students leave the school in Year 11 with standards that are broadly average. In a few subjects, the progress is not as good, and standards remain below average.

Key Stage 3 assessment data indicate that there has been a continuing trend of improvement in the key subjects of mathematics and science. Challenging targets and careful monitoring by senior staff have contributed to the successes in these subjects. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 dipped in English in 2007 but assessment data for 2008 show that students did much better. While standards remain below average, this represents good achievement based on the students' starting points in Year 7.

Examination results at the end of Year 11 have significantly improved in 2008 for English and mathematics. The school achieved 61% with five A* to C GCSE grades in all subjects compared with 43% in 2007. Recent changes in the curriculum, involving the increased availability of vocational courses such as BTEC, have helped to raise standards. The school has targeted certain groups of students well. For instance, Pakistani students achieved considerably better results than they have in the past. Achievement amongst boys was also much better in 2008. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the very good support they receive. The school is justifiably proud of these achievements but recognises that a few subjects are not matching these standards. In some cases, standards have been low for a number of years and the progress made by students is below that expected. Senior leaders have accurately identified the subjects that need to improve quickly.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students across the school behave well. They treat each other with respect, work effectively together and share activities, often helping those younger than

themselves. This is evident in the way that older students help younger ones with their reading. Students from many different backgrounds and ethnicities collaborate on their tasks and support each other. Students say that they enjoy school and this would seem to be true as, despite attendance being below average, it is improving because of rigorous action taken by the school. However, students are not always punctual, both at the start of the day and to their lessons. Students have a good sense of right and wrong and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They benefit from the caring ethos, which helps them to feel valued. 'There is always someone to talk to if you have a problem,' commented one student. The strong focus on health and safety results in students knowing how to keep safe. They know and respect the school rules. Students lead healthy lives and understand the importance of a healthy diet. 'The food is really healthy, there is always lots of choice,' commented a student. They take regular exercise, consistently attending the many after-school sports activities. Those in school sports teams are very proud of their achievements. Students contribute well to the local community through a range of fundraising activities. For example, the younger students are currently collecting funds for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) following a project on animals, while all students regularly support local charities such as 'Dogs for hearing impaired people', 'Children in Need' and 'Red Nose Day.' Students develop good levels of confidence and self-esteem during their time at the school. This is evident in the way many older students talk confidently to visitors about their school and about their hopes for the future. Many have high aspirations. Preparation for their future well-being is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Lessons are well planned and a variety of teaching methods and strategies are employed to engage and motivate students. Relationships between teachers and students are good and learning support assistants work effectively with teachers to ensure students who find learning difficult are well supported. This is particularly evident in the work of the committed classroom assistants supporting hearing impaired students. ICT is used to good effect.

Although satisfactory overall, the progress of most students is increasingly good and a significant and increasing number of lessons are outstanding. The monitoring and marking of students' work, including homework, is good in core subjects and especially where achievement is stronger. Constructive and diagnostic analysis further supports progression. In the main, students are aware of the level of their attainment, and in some cases their targets, but are rather vague about what they need to do to raise them further.

A range of intervention strategies have been employed successfully, to raise attainment, but these lack uniformity across departments. A lack of pace and direction in a minority of lessons leads to low-level disruption. As a result, the speed of learning is reduced and the enjoyment that students experience diminishes. However, good progress is being made in using data to raising expectations,

although the school is at an early stage in adopting a whole-school approach to the tracking of student progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is broad and balanced. The programme for personal, social and health education, including citizenship, is good and students enjoy the activities they undertake, including various themed days. The curriculum has been under dynamic development and the school has established a tradition for innovation. It is now more relevant and accessible to students and, as a result, attainment has been significantly raised. New vocational subjects, including BTEC courses, are specific examples of this. Links with other schools in the local cluster and the city of Stoke have brought benefits, as have the links with other post-16 providers, such as the local colleges. The curriculum is under an ongoing review and is flexible, allowing changes to be made to reflect the needs and interests of students. The effectively structured programme of extra-curricular activities gives students a worthy range of wider opportunities. The media and visual arts have brought many benefits to the curriculum and supported a diverse range of opportunities from art trips to media projects. The specialism has not had sufficient time to be fully integrated across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The pastoral care provided for all students is outstanding, ensuring that students of all abilities are well cared for by a highly committed staff team. Vulnerable students are particularly well cared for by the whole-school community, with students demonstrating high levels of responsibility towards each other and towards those younger than themselves. Students who speak English as an additional language, as well as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, benefit from good additional support provided in small-group sessions. As a result, they improve their skills and achieve well. Procedures to develop and maintain positive behaviour are good, resulting in a calm and harmonious atmosphere around the school. Bullying and racism are extremely rare and are tackled quickly and appropriately. Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements. Good academic guidance and tracking procedures have recently been introduced. These have just started to give a clear picture of how well students are doing and are helping staff to set challenging targets, as well as identifying any student requiring additional support. Students know their targets and are many are involved in assessing their own work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through effective self-evaluation. This has enabled them to take actions that have resulted in the improvement of achievement and standards. The headteacher is inspirational in his leadership and all staff and the governing body share his vision for continuous school improvement. Leadership is strong in the core subjects and, as a result, these subjects are performing well. The dynamic leadership and management that are raising standards are providing the school with a good

capacity to improve. The governors know the school well and are beginning to take a more active role in debating new initiatives put forward by the management team. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and appreciate what is being done to raise standards.

The school uses challenging targets for all students to aim for and monitors their progress towards them well. Students are given clear advice on what to do to improve in the core subjects. These targets, together with extra support and resources, are used effectively to minimise low attainment among particular groups of students such as those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Leaders and managers promote the well-being of students well and take effective measures to ensure their safety when under school supervision. Students' personal development is fostered well and this manifests itself in the many ways that they are involved in supporting the community, other local schools and each other. The school has a clear understanding of what is required to promote community cohesion based upon its analysis of students' and local community needs and takes effective steps to support these needs. The school provides limited opportunities to develop students' understanding of community cohesion in relation to other countries through international links.

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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
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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?	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
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	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

10 October 2008

Dear Students,

**Inspection of Thistley Hough, Stoke on Trent ST4 5JJ**

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome at your school. We were all pleased to see the polite and warm way in which you greeted us and helped us to find out about Thistley Hough. You go to an exciting and improving school where a great deal is going on. We were very impressed by the standard of your artwork – it felt like we had entered a gallery! We spent the two days finding out about the ways in which Mr Haines and his team of teachers are making things better for you. You are helping by working hard. Thistley Hough is a satisfactory school with an increasing number of good features. The strengths of the school are:

- The standards in the school are improving in the key areas of English, mathematics and science.
- You should be very proud of the GCSE results in 2008, which were the best ever.
- Your behaviour is good and you make a real contribution to your school through your community links and your roles as student prefects. The work of the Gener8 dance group and the community DVD project on antisocial behaviour are great examples of how you are making an impact both locally and nationally.
- Your school is a caring place and the staff look after you well.
- Your curriculum has changed recently and you have many more opportunities to study subjects that interest you.
- Mr Haines is doing an outstanding job leading your school towards continuing improvement. He is very well supported by the senior teachers, all of whom have your very best interests at heart. The managers, teachers, governors and staff are very committed to their work.

We have asked Mr Haines and the governing body to make the following improvements:

- Improve standards in all subjects so that they match those of the best subjects.
- Improve levels of attendance and punctuality. You can help him here by making sure that you get the education that you need by coming to school every day and getting to lessons on time.
- Increase the extent to which the school's media and visual arts specialism features in all of the other subjects that you study.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Davinder Dosanjh
Her Majesty's Inspector