

Park Hall School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104116
Local Authority	Solihull
Inspection number	323971
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Marion Thompson

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 pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1136
Sixth form	141
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Hiorns
Headteacher	Ann Green
Date of previous school inspection	30–31 January 2008
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	Birmingham
	B36 9HF
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school with a small sixth form. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. Other members of the school population come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Few students are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average, but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below that usually found. In October 2005, the school was placed in Special Measures. It was removed in January 2008, when it was given a Notice to Improve. Since December 2007, the school has worked in an informal partnership with a nearby successful specialist school. The headteacher of the partnership school leads both schools. In November 2008, the school moved into a new building in a different part of the site. Park Hall has been sponsored by the partner school and is to become an academy in September 2009. The principal designate has been appointed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement. This is now a satisfactory school, which provides an effective education for students in Years 7 to 11 and the sixth form. The school has made significant improvement since the previous inspection in January 2008 and the notice to improve monitoring visit in October 2008. Many aspects of provision, such as students' personal development and the care, support and guidance the school provides, are now good. The school has established a better reputation in the community, as evidenced by the sharp increase in applications for entry into Year 7. Parents are keen to endorse the work of the school, because they recognise and appreciate the extent of recent improvements.

By Year 11, standards are broadly average, representing satisfactory achievement from students' broadly average standards on entry to Year 7. Progress has accelerated over the past two years, especially in Key Stage 4. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is now good and enables students to make up lost ground. Achievement in recently introduced vocational courses is good and has contributed strongly to raising standards. Early entry to GCSE examinations and coursework indicate that students are on track to reach or exceed many of their challenging targets in the core subjects, except in mathematics. Despite rising sharply since last year, standards in this subject remain below average. This is because students had more ground to make up. In addition, the quality of teaching and marking, whilst satisfactory and improving, remains too varied. The mathematics department has also suffered from staffing difficulties but these are now being resolved. Most students have already attained at least one GCSE A* to G and are on target to achieve at least five. Tracking information indicates that a much higher percentage of students than last year are on course to achieve 5 A* to C GCSE grades.

Provision for students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities has been reorganised and is now good, enabling these students to achieve well. Effective dissemination of best practice, supported by staff from this and the partner school, has led to improvements in teaching and learning. Teaching is now securely satisfactory and an increasing proportion is good or outstanding, especially at Key Stage 4. In English and science, teaching is consistently good. Students in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory progress overall. In a small minority of lessons in Key Stage 3, teaching does not actively engage students' interest and the level of challenge is too low, especially for the most able students. Marking has improved, and frequently provides clear guidance to students on how to reach their targets. It is, however, too inconsistent across the school.

Improvements to the curriculum and academic guidance, both of which are now good, underpin recent improvements in achievement and promote students' evident enjoyment of learning. Vocational courses have rekindled the interest of some older students in learning. Students on vocational courses make a good contribution to the local community, for example by working in primary schools and nurseries. Early entry to GCSE courses raises students' expectations and self-esteem. The reviewed curriculum in Year 7 ensures students get off to a good start. Close monitoring of

students' progress and individual learning consultations, which are highly valued by students, ensure that barriers to learning are identified quickly and overcome.

The introduction of four vertically grouped 'mini-schools' within the school has had a profound effect on increasing students' sense of belonging, promoting good behaviour, and increasing attendance, which is now broadly average. There is a calm and purposeful ethos in the school, and students treat each other with respect and behave safely. Incidents of racism have reduced dramatically. Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. Students have a good awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle and demonstrate this in the eating habits and physical activities they engage in whilst in school. Their good social development and literacy skills and satisfactory skills in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) prepare them soundly for the future.

The driving force behind these changes has been the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher, who has provided an ambitious sense of direction for the school. She has raised expectations through setting challenging targets, which are based on an accurate analysis of the work of the school. Many of these targets are now met and, in some cases, exceeded. The capacity of middle and senior leaders has been improved, often through the creative use of excellent partnership arrangements and well-targeted staff development. Governors provide good support and challenge to the school. Leadership and management are good and the school is well placed to improve further.

The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion by developing students' understanding of their rights and responsibilities as members of the immediate and global community. This is done through the well-organised personal, social and health education (PSE) programme and excellent local partnerships, for example undertaking joint activities with students in the partner school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The number of students going into the sixth form has increased rapidly, because the choice of courses has been extended to meet the needs of a wider group. The curriculum is satisfactory and improving. A satisfactory range of AS and A2 courses and a growing number of vocational courses are offered. Retention of students is good and they speak highly of the good care, support and guidance given and the encouragement they receive to take responsibility for their own learning. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Students on A2 and AS courses make satisfactory progress from their below average starting point. Standards are below average, especially in relation to the highest grades, reflecting their standards on entry to the sixth form. Attainment is inconsistent between AS and A2 courses. Students make consistently good progress in areas such as psychology and sociology. Robust action has been taken this year to improve provision in weaker areas, for example business studies and biology, and this is reflected in higher standards and achievement for students. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory, with an increasing proportion that is good, due to well-targeted staff development. In good lessons, students are challenged to achieve their maximum potential.

Personal development is good. Students support younger students well in their vertical form groups, which develops their own leadership skills. They provide positive role models, contributing to the increased staying on rates in the sixth form. The students are active in sports leadership within the school and in the local community. The significant recent improvements are a result of accurate self-evaluation and good leadership and management. The sixth form is well placed to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in mathematics by ensuring that the quality of teaching and marking is uniformly good.
- Improve achievement in Key Stage 3 through making sure that teaching consistently engages students' interest and provides a suitable level of challenge, especially for the most able students.
- Ensure that marking always provides clear guidance to students on how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Key Stage 4 has been a particular focus for improvement, and accelerated progress has enabled students to make up for previous underachievement. Achievement is particularly good in vocational courses, such as sports studies and early years. Progress in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, but occasionally more able students do not make as much progress as they should, because teaching lacks sufficient challenge. In some areas, for example English, physical education, science and humanities, students make good and occasionally outstanding progress, because of consistently good teaching. In other areas, progress, whilst satisfactory, is slower. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because provision is well matched to their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are confident, polite and work in a responsible manner. They enjoy school and feel assured that instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. The new building has developed students' pride in belonging to the school and behaviour is good. Attitudes to learning are positive and improving. Attendance has improved noticeably and is now broadly average. Students adopt safe practices and understand the importance of healthy eating and adopting healthy lifestyles. They participate enthusiastically in the wide range of after-school activities. Students value the opportunity to express their views through the school council. One of their ideas, 'Fruit Friday', has been adopted as a whole-school initiative. Opportunities to interact with the community, for example helping in a local old people's home, contribute to students' good moral, social and cultural development. Spiritual development is a little weaker. Students derive great benefit from work-based learning placements with local businesses and colleges. They are prepared well for the world of work by a variety of events, including specialised days, such as interviews with employers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Lessons are characterised by mutually respectful relationships which motivate students to learn. A common approach to lesson planning ensures that learning objectives are clear so that students are aware of what they have to achieve. This also includes objectives for the social and emotional aspects of learning, which frequently have a positive impact on students' attitudes to their work. A range of effective strategies are used to ensure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities succeed and to develop their confidence. In the best lessons, especially in Key Stage 4, teachers encourage students to learn actively through experiment and enquiry. In these lessons, students respond by working productively and with commitment. Ongoing assessment makes students aware of their success and motivates them to improve further. However, in a minority of lessons, especially in Key Stage 3, the level of challenge does not fully meet the needs of all students, especially the most able. In a few lessons when teaching does not fully engage the students' interests, for example in ICT and design and technology, the pace of learning is slowed. Some marking explains clearly what students have to do to improve but occasionally it is not sufficiently detailed to guide them.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum increasingly meets students' needs and aspirations, especially in Years 7, 10 and 11. Older students now choose from a wider range of options, which includes a growing number of vocational courses. Students appreciate the immediacy of continuous assessment and the opportunities for independent research these courses provide, and uptake is good. As a by-product, teachers further develop their skills in assessment and in providing opportunities for independent learning. The revised curriculum in Year 7 has been received enthusiastically by students, who respond with evident enjoyment to the more active science course. An integrated approach to humanities promotes well the development of thinking skills. Students also appreciate and enjoy the PSE programme and the good opportunities to prepare them for the future and the world of work. The curriculum is enriched by an increasingly diverse range of clubs, visits and sporting activities. These are valued by the students, who participate in large numbers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The development of 'mini-schools' has increased the effectiveness of the rigorous and challenging target-setting process, which is supporting the acceleration of students' progress. Students feel that the individual consultation process also helps them to make sensible choices about the future. It supports the good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The implementation of the learning policy has significantly improved behaviour, which is now good. The school has robust systems to protect students and to ensure that the environment is safe. Vulnerable students are supported very well, and child protection, safeguarding and

risk assessment procedures are securely in place. The school works effectively with a wide range of outside agencies. Careful intervention ensures that students follow appropriate learning pathways, which successfully promotes increased rates of participation in post-16 education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, supported by the well directed senior team, middle leaders and staff, provides excellent leadership for the school. Her clear vision and values have led to a culture of high expectations which in turn is raising standards and achievement and improving students' personal development, especially in relation to behaviour and attendance. Self-evaluation is robust. The school has successfully built the capacity of leaders at all levels, using the partnership arrangement skilfully and to mutual benefit. Subject leadership is good overall and areas of identified weakness are tackled. Governors have made difficult decisions in the best interests of the students. The transition to a new school has been managed with minimum disruption and maximum benefit. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion through the close links it has formed with the local community. Students have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, but the development of international links is a little slower.

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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?	3	3
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	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	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.

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

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B



15 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Park Hall School, Castle Bromwich B36 9HF

Thank you for the friendly welcome you gave us when we visited your school. Some of your parents responded to our questionnaire, so please convey our thanks to them. Many of you told us how proud you were of the school, how much you liked the new buildings and how much you appreciated the many recent improvements, so we are pleased to tell you that the school no longer needs a Notice to Improve.

The school provides you with a satisfactory education in Years 7–11 and the sixth form. The headteacher and staff are working hard to make sure it continues to improve and a lot of aspects of its work, like the care, support and guidance provided to you through the 'mini-school' system, are already good. More of you are staying on in the sixth form, because the courses offered are more closely matched to your needs and interests. Standards and achievement in the sixth form are improving because of good leadership and management.

In Years 7 to 11, you make satisfactory progress and by Year 11 reach broadly average standards. A lot of older students have worked hard, supported by teachers, to make up lost ground. Staff keep a close eye on your progress and plan activities to give you extra help when you need it. Some of you also found that vocational courses were more interesting than the work you had previously been doing. Early entry to GCSE examinations has shown you that you can be successful and many of you are keen to improve your results further. Teaching is matched to your needs. Those of you who find it more difficult to learn do well, because you are effectively supported.

Because staff take good care of you and relationships within the school are good, you develop confidence and have good attitudes to learning. You enjoy school and behaviour has improved tremendously. It is now good. Attendance has risen as well, so keep it up. Many of you attend the after-school clubs the school runs. You take your responsibilities seriously, like helping out in the local old people's home.

In order to improve things further, we have asked the school to: raise achievement in mathematics by ensuring that teaching is always good, help you make faster progress in Key Stage 3 by making sure that teaching is interesting and provides you with a good level of challenge, especially if you are very clever, and to check that marking throughout the school provides you with clear advice on how to improve your work. The school is now well placed to help you to improve even more.

Yours faithfully

Marion Thompson
Lead inspector