

Hummersknott School and Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114323
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	325991
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Wendy Ripley 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Moira Bayne
Headteacher	Mr Pat Howarth
Date of previous school inspection	December 2005
School address	Edinburgh Drive Darlington County Durham DL3 8AR
Telephone number	01325 241191
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Hummersknott School and Language College is a larger than average 11 to 16 secondary school, which is oversubscribed. It is situated in a fairly affluent area, but it serves students from across Darlington, including areas of high social and economic disadvantage. Attainment on entry in Year 7 is above average. Most of the students are White British and the proportion for whom English is not their first language is very low. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is below average. Fewer than average students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Hummersknott was redesignated as a specialist language college in 2005. It holds accreditations for Artsmark Silver, Eco-schools Silver, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents silver award for Health and Safety and an International School Award. At the time of the inspection the school was in the middle of extensive building work and refurbishment.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hummersknott is a good school with a number of outstanding features. The headteacher provides a very clear vision and communicates this effectively to staff and pupils. The promotion of community cohesion is outstanding. Hummersknott is a very inclusive school because of the excellent range of support available for vulnerable students. The school's relationships with its partners are second to none, extending and enriching provision and the opportunities available to students. The majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school.

Standards throughout the school are above average. Students make good progress overall between Key Stages 2 and 4. The progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good because of the effective support they receive. The school missed its specialist college targets in modern foreign languages recently as a result of staffing difficulties in 2006 and 2007. School leaders took decisive action to address this, and the school's accurate tracking data shows that achievement is improving in the specialist subjects and accelerating throughout Key Stage 3 as a result.

Teaching and learning are good. The quality of most lessons is good or better and most students make good progress as a result. The standard of students' work including in the school's specialist subjects is now good. Teachers' use of questioning techniques is variable and does not always encourage students to make full and considered responses. Assessment information is used effectively to plan classroom activities but it is not always used confidently enough to tailor activities to meet the full range of students' needs.

The curriculum is good and improving. Extensive planning is underway in order to broaden the curriculum throughout the school with effect from September 2009, when new facilities come on stream once the building work is completed. Students value the extensive range of extra-curricular activities and these are well attended. The school's language specialism adds an exciting international dimension. This creates outstanding opportunities for students to broaden their knowledge and understanding of the wider world and enriches their skills for the world of work.

Students' personal development and well-being are good, supported by a good personal and social education curriculum. Students enjoy coming to school and appreciate the good relationships they have with staff and each other. Pastoral care and support for students are notable strengths. Vulnerable students are cared for extremely well. There are robust systems to track students' progress and provide appropriate support quickly. Students receive good information and advice.

Attendance is good. Students feel safe and the very few incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Behaviour is good in lessons, although a few students and parents expressed concerns about low-level disruption in a very small number of lessons. Staff are already working hard to put this right. Inspectors were impressed by the students' good behaviour, stoic attitudes and careful attention to safety as they moved around the school amidst the building work.

The leadership team know the strengths and weakness of the school well. They are ably assisted by managers at all levels, ensuring that the school identifies the right priorities for improvement and puts in place clear plans to secure these. Strategies to monitor and evaluate the success of the school's actions are rigorous and effective. Governors are kept well informed and are not afraid to question and challenge senior leaders if they feel it is necessary. The school provides good value for money and has a good capacity to improve further.

All the staff have played a key role in keeping the school safe, clean and operating smoothly throughout the building work. Students are very proud of the new facilities already in place and are eagerly awaiting final completion. As one student put it, 'We can see the improvements the school has already made both to our facilities and to our lessons, especially languages, over the last year. We are excited about the opportunities the changes will bring for us next year and for our brothers and sisters in the future.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop teachers' questioning techniques so that they provide opportunities for classroom discussion, enabling students to give full and considered responses and raise questions of their own.
- Improve the use of assessment information in order to tailor activities to meet the full range of students' needs

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards in Key Stage 4 are above average. The proportion of students obtaining at least five GCSE passes with high grades has remained above average since 2005. Provisional results for 2008 indicate good levels of achievement and above average standards have been sustained. Students achieve particularly well at the higher levels in English, mathematics, science, business studies, design and technology, and sports. Students make good progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 overall, with many students having learning difficulties and/or disabilities making very good progress. Standards in Key Stage 3 are above average. National test results in English, mathematics and science have remained above average since 2005 with more students achieving at the higher levels than found nationally.

In 2007, results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 dipped slightly. Standards and achievement in German, Spanish and other modern foreign languages throughout the school also dropped because of significant staffing difficulties experienced throughout 2006 and 2007. This meant that the school missed its specialist college targets. School leaders have taken robust action to tackle these pockets of underachievement. The school's reliable tracking data shows that students' progress in Key Stage 3 and in modern foreign languages has quickened in response to the successful efforts of managers to raise standards. Current work in lessons and scrutiny of students' work confirms this improving picture and the school is on track to hit its specialist targets this year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Most students enjoy coming to school and benefit from the very positive relationships they have with staff and each other. They appreciate the support and encouragement they receive from staff and the extra time and effort given by staff to provide them with a good range of extra-curricular activities and to help with homework. Most students report feeling safe in school and are confident that they can turn to an adult for help if necessary. Attendance is good. Early identification of and support for those at risk of poor attendance have resulted in significant improvements. The number of exclusions has also significantly reduced. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and bullying is rare and managed effectively. Students feel they play a big part in creating a positive and safe environment for learning. They are rightly proud of the contribution they make to the life of the school and the support they give to each other by acting as peer mentors and prefects, recognising that they gain a lot individually from these opportunities in return. Students have a good understanding of the benefits of eating sensibly, keeping fit and being healthy.

Students have a powerful voice in the school through the school council, exemplified in its important role in the design and refurbishment of the new building. Students' moral, social and cultural development is good, and their spiritual development is satisfactory. Most students make effective and positive contributions to their own community and further afield. For example, they provide an outstanding annual music festival and regularly raise funds for charities and good causes such as the link schools in Lesotho and Nepal.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Students enjoy learning and make good progress because of the good and sometimes outstanding teaching in most lessons. Teachers have high expectations of students and lessons are generally characterised by a sense of purpose and good relationships between students and teachers. This is backed up by an effective system of rewards and sanctions that is well understood by the students and applied consistently by teachers. In the majority of lessons, the teachers' good subject knowledge and interesting tasks challenge and engage most students so that they are not tempted to disrupt learning.

Students respond well to opportunities to work independently and engage in paired and group work. Classroom assistants work hard individually to provide appropriate support for those students who need it. Increasingly teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to add pace and interest to lessons. Teachers' use of questioning techniques is variable. In the best lessons, questions skilfully draw out lively and stimulating discussions which improve students' verbal fluency, encouraging them to think for themselves and raise their own questions. In some lessons, however, teachers rely too much on questions with 'yes' or 'no' answers to check students' understanding. As a result, learners are not sufficiently engaged and have less opportunities to contribute their ideas and opinions.

Assessment information is used effectively to plan classroom activities as a whole, but not all teachers use this information confidently enough to tailor activities to meet the full range of learners' needs. Students are generally clear about their targets and are regularly informed about how well they are doing. Most books are marked thoroughly and teachers' feedback on key pieces of work provides students with clear guidance about what they need to do to improve. The school's regular programme of lesson observations is thorough and results in professional development activities which are well targeted to improve the quality of provision.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The 'achievement centre' is particularly effective in raising the aspirations and improving the attendance of students who are experiencing difficulties with their studies. In Key Stage 4, a variety of pathways cater for the needs of students of all abilities. For example, the most able students have access to AS level Critical Thinking. Other students who find the academic curriculum unsuitable can choose from the school's own small range of vocational courses or follow a vocational course in a local college. In Key Stage 3, there are fewer choices for students. The school is involved in extensive planning in order to broaden the curriculum throughout the school with effect from September 2009, when the building work has been completed. It is the intention to provide exciting new facilities and the resources needed to deliver a wider range of choices throughout the school. An extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities which includes swimming, sport, arts, drama and homework clubs ensures students' experiences within school are richly enhanced. 'Off-timetable' days spent on special topics such as careers or alcohol and drug awareness are effective in concentrating students' thoughts on important issues and enable the school to use the expertise of visitors who have specialist knowledge. The school's language specialism adds an exciting international dimension to the curriculum and greatly benefits students' personal development. It creates outstanding opportunities for students to broaden their workplace skills and their knowledge and understanding of the wider world.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good with many exemplary features. Pastoral support is outstanding. Staff know the students well. The appointment of student support officers, learning mentors, an early intervention officer and a school counsellor has enhanced academic guidance and established extremely high levels of pastoral care. The strong external networks built by support staff ensures that specialist help can be put in place swiftly and effectively when need be. These improvements have a very positive impact on the retention and re-engagement of those young people who are most at risk. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those in public care is good and they make very good progress as a result.

Transition arrangements are very effective because of the excellent relationships with primary schools and post-16 providers. The 'five colleges' structure helps younger students feel more confident and cared for so that they settle in well. It also

engenders a sense of belonging and healthy internal competition throughout the school.

Students receive good information and advice which helps them to make appropriate and informed decisions about subject choices and future educational and career opportunities. This helps their progression into the world of work. Consequently, the vast majority of Hummersknott students are motivated to continue learning beyond school or progress into employment or training.

Child protection and safeguarding procedures are in place and meet government requirements. Health and safety and risk assessment procedures are robust and very effectively managed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. Self-evaluation is outstanding. The headteacher has a very clear vision for the school's development and improvement which he has successfully communicated to the staff and students. It is very strongly rooted in a student-centred approach which runs hand in hand with a drive to raise standards. Intended improvements have been managed well and the results are clear to see. Consequently, all groups of stakeholders now believe that students' conduct, personal development and achievement have improved strongly since the last inspection. The school's reviews of its performance on all fronts are thorough and lead to secure responsibility and accountability for future action. This is particularly true when the views of governors, staff, pupils and parents are sought and incorporated into the planning cycle. Governors play an important part in the school's improvement. They understand its strengths and strongly challenge any areas of perceived weakness. For example, they constantly check that GCSE results in the specialist college language subjects are improving from their previously unsatisfactory levels.

The headteacher is ably assisted by managers at all levels in ensuring that the school moves securely through its current cycle of improvement. New staffing structures, good delegation of responsibility and clear lines of communication are instrumental in ensuring that the good plans are fully realised. Even though building work is affecting a large proportion of the site, the school's managers have planned extremely successfully to minimise disruption so that pupils' education and teachers' planning do not suffer unduly. The school makes an outstanding contribution to the life of the local and wider community, especially through the international dimension it has built as part of the school's specialist language status. Staff morale is good and helps to underpin the capacity to make further improvements, which is also good.

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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?	2
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

¹Grade 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.

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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
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



14 November 2008

Dear Students

**Inspection of Hummersknott School and Language College, Darlington,
DL3 8AR**

Thank you very much for making us feel so welcome when we came to carry out the inspection of your school. It was a pleasure to talk to you and to hear that you feel happy and safe and enjoy your learning. You told us that Hummersknott is a good school that is improving and already has a number of exemplary features; we agree with you. Standards are above average, you are taught well and make good progress in most subjects.

You are rightly proud of the outstanding part you all play in the local community and further afield through fund raising and other charitable activities, and within school through the support you give to each other by acting as peer mentors and prefects. Your school council is well organised and effective and most of you contribute to decision making, including the design of the new buildings. More than that, we know that collectively you have a very powerful voice because we were lucky enough to hear it in action in the music festival that you organised and performed yourself. It was absolutely brilliant. Well done!

During our two days in school we found you to be polite young people who behave well in lessons and have great relationships with each other and the staff. Nevertheless, we know that some of you (and your parents) get fed up with the silly behaviour in a very small number of lessons and we want to reassure you that the staff are working hard to improve this. We were really impressed by how well you are coping with the building work and the extra attention and care you are taking as you move around the school.

The international experiences you get through the wide range of foreign languages you can study, the numerous trips and visits available to you and your links with Lesotho, Nepal, Russia and China are outstanding. They add to your knowledge and understanding of the world. You are very fortunate to have one of only 12 Confucius classrooms in England.

Overall, the staff take very good care of you, provide you with interesting lessons and a good range of experiences that prepare you well for your future lives and the world of work. The headteacher and all of the staff are working hard to provide you with a good quality of education. They are going to take a couple of actions that will improve things further at Hummersknott. These are to:

- ensure that the questions teachers ask provide you with opportunities to give full and considered responses, think of questions of your own and engage in discussions
- tailor classroom activities so that they meet all of your individual learning needs more effectively

We were very impressed with the facilities in the new buildings you already have. You can be justifiably proud of Hummersknott and can look forward with optimism to the completion of the new building and the new and exciting opportunities this will bring you next year. On behalf of the inspection team I would like to congratulate you on being part of such a good school and wish you all very happy and successful futures.

Wendy Ripley
Her Majesty's Inspector