

Highfurlong School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119868
Local Authority	Blackpool
Inspection number	327142
Inspection dates	27–28 April 2009
Reporting inspector	John Atkinson

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	55
Sixth form	22
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Higham
Headteacher	Mr Eddy Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Blackpool Old Road Blackpool FY3 7LR
Telephone number	01253 392188
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Age group	4–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

Description of the school

Highfurlong School is situated on the outskirts of Blackpool. Most pupils come from Blackpool, but a significant proportion travel from neighbouring local authorities. The school provides for pupils with moderate, severe, medical and physical difficulties but an increasing number have additional emotional, communication or complex learning difficulties. The nature of pupils' difficulties means that the majority are working well below national expectations. All pupils are of White British origin and just over a quarter of them are entitled to free school meals.

The school has achieved National Healthy Schools, Activemark, Sportsmark and Investors in People. It holds the Excellence in Enterprise Education award from the University of Warwick and is also a Registered Specialist Special Educational Needs College for Physical and Sensory Needs.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Highfurlong is an outstanding school. It has an excellent local, regional and national reputation because of its innovative practice resulting in a marvellous array of opportunities for students and pupils to maximise their potential. Parents are universally happy with the school and speak glowingly of the impact it has made on their child's life chances. As one parent commented, 'because of the school's dedication and commitment, my daughter has achieved what some thought was impossible'. Students and pupils share their parents' views and speak eloquently about why they enjoy coming to school and how proud they are of their achievements.

The headteacher's exemplary leadership is key in establishing and sustaining a hugely positive ethos in which students, pupils and staff thrive. The outcomes for students and pupils are reflected in their high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem and the very strong belief that they 'can do it' - whatever the challenge may be.

Achievement is outstanding. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage thrive in all areas of learning and make excellent progress in physical, personal and social development. Achievement in Key Stages 1 to 5 is outstanding with all groups of pupils making excellent progress. In many cases the very fast rate of progress transforms young people's lives and gives them the platform to reach heights significantly higher than they originally imagined for themselves. Young people looked after by the local authority do exceptionally well.

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support resulting in pupils' outstanding personal development. The outcomes are that students and pupils are very socially adept and able to articulate and justify personal views and opinions. The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion through its excellent links with mainstream schools, health and social service, Connexions and local business and enterprise organisations. These links lead to students and pupils participating and organising local, regional and national sporting and social activities. This is perfectly illustrated in the huge success of the Activities, Independence and Respect (AIR) group, formed by students in the school to improve access for young people with learning and/or physical difficulties. As one local link headteacher commented, 'Highfurlong make things happen'. Students and pupils have excellent trusting relationships with each other and are very generous in the ways that they support and motivate each other. It is no surprise that they enjoy school and attendance is good.

Teaching is outstanding and as a result students and pupils make excellent progress culminating in very high achievement in a wide range of accredited courses. Teachers match work very precisely to their pupils' needs. They are highly skilled at grabbing their attention at the start of lessons and sustaining their engagement and involvement throughout. They use many techniques to communicate very effectively with all groups of pupils and this leads to very inclusive learning. They are supported by a fantastic team of experienced, committed and skilled support staff whose intuitive understanding of young people's needs results in meticulous attention to individual personal and learning needs and accelerated progress. The impact of the specialist school status for physical and sensory can be evidenced in the high quality of teaching and learning of students and pupils with complex learning needs. It can also be discerned in the very high achievement in disabled sporting competitions.

The curriculum promotes students' and pupils' personal development, particularly their economic well-being, exceptionally well. The creative approaches to planning the curriculum enable strong links to be made between subjects and increases the relevance and enjoyment of learning.

Leadership and management are outstanding and lead to all staff sharing a common vision for the school and placing young people's outcomes as the number one priority. The relentless focus on maintaining the high quality of provision, the high morale of the staff and the constant search for innovative and best practice means that the school has an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement. The need to improve the tracking of pupils' progress during the year has been identified as a key priority and the assessment leader is evaluating a range of methods to achieve this aim.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. Most students join it from Highfurlong but a minority come from other schools. This is a good indicator of the students' enjoyment of school and their aspirations to fulfil their potential. Achievement is excellent and students make exceptional progress in the core skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Leavers gain external accreditation for their hard work at an appropriate level and successes range from Entry level to GCE A and AS level. Personal development is exemplary and their preparation for the next stage of their education is exceptional. Students love coming to school, are totally involved in every aspect of it and bursting with enthusiasm to contribute their own ideas. Their attendance is good. They are powerful advocates for all students and pupils and promote this in school and the local community as well as participating in high profile national forums. Some make use of their excellent artistic and ICT skills to support their own business enterprises and assist staff by, for example, making photographic and video recordings and power point presentations. Students' social and independent living skills are notable because they respond so well to an excellent curriculum that provides many opportunities to use initiative, act independently and to make and be responsible for their own decisions. Students' economic insight and their awareness of the workplace are very strongly supported through well established enterprise activities and work experiences. For example a number of students have made successful bids to the Youth Opportunities Fund for grants to support their community and training initiatives. Teaching and learning are excellent and expectations of students are high. Teachers and support staff work collaboratively to plan a very personal curriculum for all students and challenging targets are always set. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Extremely effective partnerships with other agencies are established that promote students' excellent well-being. There is great commitment to ensuring that all students have equal opportunities and none are discriminated against. The outcome is that all students go on to appropriate employment, education or training.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

The skills and personal development of children entering the Early Years Foundation Stage are well below those typical for their age. However, they thrive because of the outstanding provision made for them. They make excellent progress towards their early learning goals although by the end of the Reception Year they remain well below the national average. Children benefit from exciting opportunities to work and play inside and outdoors and experience hydrotherapy. Children's personal development and well-being are excellent. Staff know the children very well and plan collaboratively for their physical, social and learning needs. The expert support provided by teachers and support staff ensures that opportunities for learning are tailored to the special educational needs of each child. Children are helped to learn and develop very

effectively by outstanding teaching. However profound the learning difficulties and/or disabilities of children, staff take every opportunity to promote children's independence by including them effectively in all activities. Children's welfare is promoted exceptionally well in all respects. Behaviour is very well managed and children receive expert and sensitive support. Very effective communication with parents or carers ensures that children make a good start to their learning journey and settle into school quickly. The Early Years Foundation Stage is led and managed extremely well and the provision is very effective in bringing staff and children together to create happy and successful learning experience.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish a systematic approach to monitoring progress during the year.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students and pupils make exceptional progress because teaching is very imaginative and is tailored to individual needs. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage benefit from excellent support and make significant gains. Pupils in Key Stages 1 to 3 achieve extremely well. They meet or exceed the challenging targets set for them and progress is faster than that of most pupils with similar learning difficulties and/or disabilities in other schools. They make particularly good progress in numeracy, literacy, communication, ICT and the arts. Pupils' development of communication skills is excellent and those who have electronic communication aids use these with skill and competence. Progress in physical development is very strong and reflects the school's specialism; for example one pupil achieved an award for athletes showing potential to become a Paralympian. In Key Stages 4 and 5, students and pupils follow courses at Pre-Entry Level, Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC), Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (COPE), GCSE, AS and A level and adult literacy courses. In 2008 results in accredited courses were very high and exceeded the targets set leading to students accessing further education courses commensurate with their abilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students and pupils of all ages respect one another and are considerate, helpful, friendly and very well behaved. They contribute their efforts and time generously to local community projects and are champions of better access and involvement for young people with learning and/or physical difficulties. Students and pupils express a passionate commitment to the ideals of inclusion and community cohesion and are excellent role models. Attitudes to learning are extremely positive. All love coming to school and show this with their exceptionally good attendance. They feel very safe and do not think that there is any bullying or racism. They are very well informed about healthy eating, understand what a well balanced diet means and are very keen on keeping active and taking part in sport, particularly boccia. The school sports clubs are extensive and fully subscribed resulting in some excellent achievements at the Stoke Mandeville games. Students and pupils feel that their voice is listened to and are proud that the school council and AIR have helped to improve opportunities and access for all in school and the community. The opportunities for work, business and enterprise experiences and participation in vocational courses combined with pupils' exceptional progress in developing

confidence and inter-personal skills mean that they are getting excellent preparation for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding because, throughout the school, teachers prepare their lessons thoroughly and are skilled in using interactive technology to make learning stimulating. Up-to-date records are used to set precise learning and personal development targets and so work is matched extremely well to every pupil's needs. Students and pupils are assigned to teaching groups according to their needs and a range of teaching styles are routinely employed to ensure that all have equal opportunities to succeed. Support staff work very closely alongside teaching staff and are vital to the success of teaching at all levels. Teachers have high expectations and identify precise learning objectives for the next steps in learning for each student and pupil. They keep lessons moving on at a very good pace and allow students and pupils plenty of time to explore and consolidate learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is exemplary and learning experiences are tailored to individual needs. The curriculum is made accessible to the pupils who are hardest to reach. Many who have severe communication difficulties are helped to fully participate in lessons through the use of signing and communication aids. The curriculum for the Early Years Foundation Stage and post-16 are outstanding and, as with the rest of the school, an excellent range of additional activities enhances pupils' learning and enjoyment. There are very good links with local schools, colleges and businesses and these lead to good opportunities for students and pupils to become more independent. Work experience, enterprise activities and residential visits support pupils' personal and social development and give them outstanding opportunities to tackle the unknown and learn new things in different situations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The commitment to promoting the health, safety and well-being of pupils is very strong. Arrangements to protect pupils are well established and work very effectively. Safeguarding procedures meet government requirements. All necessary risk assessments are undertaken. Parents feel that the school welcomes them as partners in the education of their children. The school is vigilant in safeguarding the interests of its most vulnerable pupils and their families. Where necessary it takes a lead in organising the support of other educational establishments and agencies to work with individuals' specific needs. The process of setting targets is very well established although the school recognises the need to improve how it tracks progress during the year. Students and pupils receive excellent levels of personal support to ensure that they take a full part in all the school's extensive range of activities.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The quality of leadership at all levels is excellent. Under the inspiration of the headteacher, all staff work relentlessly to enable every pupil to be as independent as possible and to be equipped with the self-belief and self confidence to realise their potential and take as full a part in society as possible. The management of support to every young person is a very strong feature of this successful school and is praised to the hilt by the young people themselves. Self-evaluation is thorough and detailed and the constant search for best practice informs clear and decisive actions which improve outcomes for all. The school is a dynamic force in leading community cohesion and has significantly influenced positive attitudes towards young people with disability at a local and national level. Governance is exceptionally effective. It supports and challenges the school's leadership. The school gives outstanding value for money.

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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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

28 April 2009

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Highfurlong School, Blackpool, FY3 7LR

Thank you very much for making me welcome throughout the two days that I spent in your school. I was enormously impressed by your confidence, enthusiasm and 'can do' approach to everything. You are an excellent example of how all young people could and should behave. You are considerate towards each other, thoughtful about how you can make life better and are willing to put maximum effort into whatever you are doing. I have no doubt that you will benefit considerably in the future. I really enjoyed talking to you, listening to the very positive things that you had to say about the school and watching some of your very professional presentations. I was truly staggered at some of your amazing personal achievements and huge successes with your business enterprises. You all seemed to enjoy lessons and the other opportunities you are offered in school and with all the sport that you do I am not surprised that you are as fit as you are. I quickly discovered from discussions with you and the staff why you do so well in school.

- The head and the staff want the very best for you.
- The staff work very well as a team to look after you and are always prepared to listen and support you.
- You do tasks that are interesting and challenging as well as having many extra-curricular activities available.
- You are expected to work hard and help each other.

It is very clear that you enjoy school and all of your lessons. I know how much the older students enjoy organising trips and starting new ventures (particularly when making a good profit that can be spent!). I do hope that one of your future trips is to Liverpool. Your parents are also really pleased with how much improvement you have made and continue to make. I discussed with the headteacher how the school could improve even further and luckily for you the staff have very clear ideas what to do next. So the only new thing I have asked them to do is that:

- Staff will monitor your progress carefully each term to make sure that you are making as good progress as possible.

However, the most important thing is that you continue to be as positive, enthusiastic and optimistic as you were during my visit. I hope you all do well in future years and achieve what you are capable of.

John Atkinson

Lead inspector