

Gosforth High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108523
Local Authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	309719
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Christine Graham 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1704
6th form	650
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Prof Mike Goodfellow
Headteacher	Mr Hugh Robinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2003
School address	Knightsbridge Great North Road Gosforth Newcastle upon Tyne Tyne and Wear NE3 2JH
Telephone number	0191 2851000
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Gosforth High School is a larger than average high school in the centre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The number of students on roll has increased significantly in recent years. Many students are of White British heritage but about 28% are from other ethnic groups. Twenty five languages are spoken in school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is lower than in most schools. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and about a third are from more advantaged homes. Most students come from one of three local middle schools but some students join the school from other parts of the city. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low. The school hosts a unit for students with visual impairments. The school gained specialist language status in 1996 and was re-designated in April 2007. It has a number of prestigious awards and designations including recognition as an Ambassador School, one of a very small number in the country. The school is in a hard federation with Gosforth Junior High School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Students of all backgrounds and abilities make at least good and often outstanding progress in all aspects of their development because they are exceptionally well cared for and supported. Academic and personal guidance are excellent. Students receive very good guidance at key points in their school career and with health, social or personal problems. Students, staff and most parents are particularly enthusiastic about the PRAISE code. This has made a significant contribution to the excellent behaviour seen in classes and at break and lunchtimes it also helps students develop organisational and evaluative skills. Students say the code ensures that they are treated equally and that all their achievements are recognised. Students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is outstanding. The rich cultural and social mix in the school does much to prepare students for life in a diverse society.

Students make satisfactory progress during their first year in school. The results of national tests, taken at the end of Key Stage 3, show that attainment is in-line with or above average at both the nationally expected Level 5 and at higher levels. Attainment is better in mathematics and science than in English. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are high and achievement is good. In 2007 a much higher proportion of students attained the benchmark of five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, than did so nationally. Most students know how well they are achieving and what they must do to improve. The school tracks students' progress carefully and any underachievement is identified and tackled very promptly. The school provides very well for those students identified as gifted and talented and this has been recognised by its designation as an Ambassador School. The school also provides very well for the most vulnerable students and those who need extra support with learning. Visually impaired students achieve well. A very high proportion of students choose to continue their education in the sixth form where they continue to achieve well.

In recent years the school has focused its attention on improving teaching. This has been very successful. Most teaching is good, some is outstanding and a small amount is satisfactory. Nearly all lessons are taught by well informed and enthusiastic subject specialists. Effective routines and teaching methods have been adopted by all departments so students know what is expected of them. Students work well in a variety of different groupings or as individuals. They are confident when explaining their ideas to a larger group and are sensible when undertaking practical activities. Most lessons progress at a brisk pace and there are ample opportunities for students to assess their understanding or seek further help. However, in a small number of lessons, although teaching is interesting and well informed, some students do not learn as well as they might because the work they are given is not well enough matched to their needs or teachers do not expect enough of them. The school monitors the effectiveness of teaching to ensure that high standards are maintained but does not always focus sufficiently well on how well students are learning.

The school's specialist college status, in languages, does a great deal to enrich the curriculum and improve achievement. There is an impressive array of languages on offer both during the school day and before and after school. This provision also benefits a number of local schools and the wider community. The specialism has a very positive impact on many areas of the school's work. A particularly strong feature is the opportunity for students to take GCSEs in their home language. The school has exceeded its specialist targets in recent years. The curriculum is outstanding. There are a very wide range of subjects and qualifications which

meet the needs of all students very well. Innovative timetabling arrangements ensure that every minute of the time available is used to best effect.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school has made very good progress since its last inspection because the principal, governors and senior leaders are ambitious and committed to providing the very best opportunities for students. The roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team have been allocated very sensibly. Each member of the team has overall responsibility for the leadership and management of one area of the school. This system empowers staff and builds leadership capacity. It allows the senior team to manage this large and increasingly complex provision very effectively and ensures that new developments, such as very significant building work, do not have a negative impact on the work of the school. The school manages its finances very well. It is well resourced and staff have good opportunities for personal and professional development. The school is very innovative and looks for good practice locally and further afield. Although some of these innovations may be relatively small taken together they have enhanced provision so that nothing is merely ordinary and much is exemplary. School leaders and staff at all levels take on new ideas and ways of working confidently and positively and governors have both the vision to support the school and the skill to ensure that its actions are well judged. The school has very good capacity to make further improvement and provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form offers students exceptional opportunities. It has grown in recent years and is now one of the largest in the area. A very high proportion of Year 11 students choose to continue their studies in the sixth form and additional students join from other schools. Its reputation is deservedly high because students are given every opportunity to do well and are provided with exceptional care and support.

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average overall because the school encourages students of all abilities to join its roll. Examination results are rising sharply and achievement is good on all courses. At AS and A2 pass rates at A–E are above average. Performance in vocational courses at Levels 1 and 2 is good. In 2007 performance in vocational A levels was not as good as that in more academic subjects. However, tracking of students' progress suggests that this problem has been resolved and that results are set to improve. The school puts equal effort into the education of all sixth formers. This is demonstrated at one end of the spectrum by the strong entry to Oxbridge in recent years and at the other by the very good BTEC results.

Students are very enthusiastic about the sixth form. They consider that they get a very good deal. They value the very good choice of courses and the tremendous level of personal and academic support that they receive from their tutors and subject teachers. This together with good teaching and learning ensures that nearly all students who embark on courses in Year 12 see them through to completion. Personal development is outstanding. Students are extremely enthusiastic and confident learners. They take on much of the responsibility for their own learning and are exceptionally well placed to transfer to the world of work, further courses or university. Opportunities to take on responsibility are widely available and eagerly accepted, especially through the superb extra-curricular dimension of the school's curriculum. Innovative timetabling arrangements mean that students can study any combination of subjects. The specialism provides students with the opportunity to study French, Spanish, Italian or German.

The excellent provision in the sixth form is the result of exceptional leadership and management. An exciting curriculum combined with good teaching and outstanding support and guidance are key to the success of the relentless drive towards even higher personal and academic standards.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lesson observations focus on the effectiveness of learning.
- Ensure that the work given to students is matched to their ability.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

By the end of Key Stage 4 students achieve well and reach high standards. The proportion of students attaining five good GCSE passes has risen steadily in recent years and is now well above the national figure. Standards are particularly high in science, English language, modern foreign languages, mathematics, music humanities and RE. In these subjects the proportion of students attaining highest grades is well above the national average. Weaknesses in music noted at the time of the last inspection have been eradicated. The very good provision made for modern foreign languages ensures that a far higher proportion of students gain a good grade in at least one modern foreign language than do so nationally.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 are in line with national averages and achievement is satisfactory overall. Some of the most able students take mathematics tests at the end of Year 8, in their previous schools. They begin their GCSE mathematics course in Year 9. This is proving to be very effective, students enjoy the course and are achieving well.

The school tracks the progress of students very well and effective action is taken to correct any underachievement. All students, including those with learning difficulties and /or disabilities and those whose first language is other than English achieve well given their starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development is outstanding because they are very well cared for, guided and supported. Students of all ages are confident, friendly and articulate. They give thoughtful replies to questions and demonstrate that they can make sensible choices and decisions. Most students are in favour of the PRAISE code. One student said that although it sometimes appears 'a little harsh' it works, is fair and enables everyone to be treated equally. Students know that if they have a concern there is always a place to go for support or a person who knows them well and will help them. Year 9 students said they had settled into school without any difficulties because of the effectiveness of arrangements made to support this transition. Year 11 students act as peer mentors and this is very much appreciated by students new to the school. Students with particular talents help out in local first schools and students support charities and involve themselves in the life of the school and wider community. Students of all ages enjoy their education; they believe that one of the best things about the school is that it provides them with so many opportunities to pursue their interests, to participate in trips or visits or to attend clubs or after school activities. Students recognise that their teachers 'put themselves out' to

ensure that these things happen. Boys, in particular are extremely enthusiastic about the opportunities for 'active play'. They recognise that this does a great deal to keep them fit and to make social times more enjoyable. Attendance is good but, despite the best efforts of the school, a few students have a long history of poor attendance. In most cases this is a problem which began long before they joined the school. Behaviour is excellent, students behave very well in class, at social times and when walking around the building. As a result most students feel secure and safe in school. Their spiritual, moral social and cultural development is particularly good and they are aware of difficulties experienced by those less fortunate than themselves. Sixth formers commented that there are no tensions between the different groups in school but that they are aware that this is not always the case in society as a whole. Enterprise activities, work-related learning, the fantastic opportunities available within the curriculum and their very good attainment ensures that students are well prepared for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching is usually good and in some lessons it is inspirational. In the best lessons teachers have a very clear idea of how best to help students understand difficult ideas or concepts. In these lessons students complete exciting and purposeful tasks which have been carefully crafted to maximise learning. Teachers take calculated risks in providing students with a range of practical equipment which might, in less effective situations, lead to chaos. In a Year 11 physics lesson, for example, students used balloons, balls, straws and plasticine to illustrate a concept. Behaviour was exemplary; scientific knowledge was applied creatively and learning was outstanding. Within a short space of time all groups had not only modelled the concept but were also able to explain their ideas to the rest of the class by giving a short presentation. In this lesson, and others like it, all students worked diligently and enthusiastically and developed a real love of the subject. In those lessons where students made satisfactory progress, activities, although interesting, were not as well matched to their needs or to the purpose of the lesson and teachers did not challenge them enough. Students know their current levels of attainment, their targets and what they must do to improve further. They are encouraged to assess the progress they have made during a lesson and ask for extra help where necessary.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

There is an outstanding range of academic and vocational opportunities available because the school makes very good use of the time available. Most days have seven periods but some are slightly shorter to allow students to take part in the very good range of extra-curricular activities. An outstanding enrichment programme which focuses on work experience, enterprise activities and visits, takes place during specific weeks of the year. This ensures that all students benefit from these experiences and lessons are not disrupted by the absence of staff or students. No time is lost at the end of the school year because students begin the next year's work in June rather than in September. The school's specialism does much to enrich the curriculum, all students study at least one modern foreign language and many students study two or more. The curriculum is good in both key stages but is particularly strong at Key Stage 4. Each student

follows a personalised curriculum which is linked to eleven pathways, the majority of which have clear progression routes into sixth form study or into opportunities available in the area. The provision made for gifted and talented students is exceptional. Students explore their talent in mixed age groups, benefit from additional activities and visits and have regular review meetings with staff to ensure that the support they are given is appropriate. The curriculum for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those who require more support is equally robust. There are a very good range of pathways available in school and for those most at risk of disaffection the 'Own It' project offers interesting opportunities for work experience or training. Facilities for physical education (PE) are limited although this situation is about to improve as part of a substantial building project. The school is doing all it can to compensate for this in the shorter term.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. All students have at least one adult, in addition to their subject teachers, who looks after their learning and personal needs. Learning plan managers and sixth form tutors know the students in their care very well and build up good relationships with them. Some students are part of more than one group and information about their development is shared. The school is organised in such a way that all students have a place to go where they feel safe and know they will receive support. A health professional is available to give advice. All appropriate safeguarding and health and safety procedures are in place. Assessment procedures very effectively ensure that all students reach their potential; some students are identified as gifted and talented in one subject and requiring additional support in another. Relationships within school are very good. The school celebrates success. The PRAISE code ensures that all achievements are recognised and students enjoy seeing visual confirmation of their endeavours in their planners. Communication with parents is very good. There are two review meetings a year as well as the more usual subject meetings. School planners are the link between home and school and these ensure that parents are kept well informed. When students achieve particularly well a postcard is sent home to parents. The school has very good partnerships with schools in the area and further afield and works well in partnership with the community.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The principal, governors and senior leaders manage this large and increasingly complex school very effectively. Governors are skilled and very experienced. They have worked hard to provide the best possible building and facilities for students. They were equally determined that these improvements would lead to improved attainment and have monitored the work of the school very carefully in order to ensure that this happened. They are, rightly, delighted with all that the school has achieved.

The leadership of the principal is outstanding. He has brought a spirit of innovation to the school, and staff at all levels are encouraged to seek out and apply new and more effective practice or ways of working. The principal is very skilled at identifying potential and giving

important roles and responsibilities to those with the potential to deliver. As a result the senior leadership team are highly effective and manage their individual directorates with skill and evident enthusiasm. Middle leaders manage their areas well and their hard work is ensuring that students' achievement continues to improve.

The highly structured and efficient management system ensures that new initiatives or innovations are securely embedded and monitored in order to provide the best possible provision for students. School self-evaluation is extremely honest and very accurate. Plans made to improve the school correctly identify the most important priorities and take an appropriately long term view. The risks associated with new ventures are carefully assessed and action is taken to lessen any potentially negative impact. Communication and team work is a strength of the school. Meetings are carefully planned and minuted to ensure that information is accurate and up-to-date. Staff benefit from very good personal and professional development and as a result they are confident, well informed and very adaptable.

Most parents are delighted with all that the school provides. Parents who chose to make additional comments identified the hard work of the principal and the staff as the most important ingredient in the school's success.

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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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is 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	
How well 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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
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

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.

Annex A

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	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

31 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Gosforth High School, Newcastle upon Tyne. NE3 2JH

Thank you for being so welcoming when I visited your school with Mrs Sewell, Mr Paddick, Mr Potter and Mr Self. We very much enjoyed our visit and particularly enjoyed meeting you and watching you work. I am delighted to tell you that your school is an outstanding school. Your teachers take care of you exceptionally well and give you very good guidance. You told us that you have fantastic opportunities to develop your interests and talents and we were pleased to see that you appreciate the fact that your teachers go 'out of their way' to help you both during the day and after school.

Students join your school from all types of backgrounds and with a range of different needs. We could see how well you all get on with each other. Sixth form students confirmed that there are no tensions in school. We think your understanding of different cultures, your good achievement, and the opportunities you have to sample the world of work and learn additional languages prepare you very well for your future lives. Teaching is usually good and sometimes it is outstanding. We were very impressed by the ways in which your teachers make lessons interesting for you. You play your part by behaving in a mature and sensible way both during lessons and at social times. In a few lessons not all students learn as well they could because the work they are given does not challenge them enough. We have asked the school to make sure that you all get work which is well matched to your needs. We have also asked the leadership team to make sure that you are all learning as well as you can.

Mr Robinson, the governors and staff are constantly looking for ways to improve the school further. Building work which is due to start very soon will improve the provision for PE. In the short term the school is compensating for the limitations in provision, active play at social times appears to be particularly appreciated. Most parents and students were very positive about the PRAISE code. Students told us that although it 'seems a little harsh' it actually works and ensures that the efforts of all students are appreciated and that you are treated fairly. We liked the fact that all your achievements are celebrated and that you know exactly what is expected of you. We noticed that you are all very well prepared for lessons. Your school is a very exciting place because the leadership team encourage the teachers to do things differently. Many of your parents told us that the school gives you an excellent education and we agree with them. We wish you well in the future.

Best wishes

Christine Graham HMI