

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

INSPECTION REPORT

**INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002**

Name of school:	Highfield School
DCSF number:	830/6023
FOCUS number:	309/310
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Cecile Corfield Mr Ted Cohn Lay Inspector: Mr Mike Thomas
Dates of inspection:	23 – 26 November, 2009

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Section C: The quality of organisation and management

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Highfield School

Address of the school: Wellington Street, Long Eaton, Nottingham,
NG10 4HR

Telephone number: 0115 973 3568

Fax number: 0115 973 5518

Email address: Highfield@focus-school.com

Proprietor: Trent Valley Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr Paul Groombridge

Name of Head Teacher: Mr Charles Mills

DCSF number: 830/6023

FOCUS number: 309/310

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: 7 – 18 Years

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 40 Girls: 58

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 7 Girls: 11

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: 0

Annual fees: No fees charged

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell
Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Cecile Corfield
Mr Ted Cohn
Lay Inspector: Mr Mike Thomas

Dates of inspection: 23 – 26 November 2009

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A)(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Focus Learning Trust. His findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Highfield School opened on its present site in Long Eaton, on the outskirts of Nottingham, in September 2009. It is registered with the DCSF as an independent school of special religious character. The new school brings together primary and secondary pupils. Secondary pupils and most of the staff have come from a similar in nearby Beeston known as the Three Shires, and pupils of primary age attended a range of maintained schools. Pupils who attend the school travel mainly from north Leicestershire, Derby and Nottingham. The new school is housed in large former Edwardian primary school buildings, and is listed as being of outstanding interest and quality. It has been extensively refurbished and improved within the guidelines set out by English Heritage. The refurbishment of the buildings was completed ready for the beginning of the school year with the support of the parents and the local Brethren community. There are currently 98 boys and girls between seven and eighteen years of age attending the school, 33 in the primary department and 65 in the secondary, of whom eighteen are in the sixth form. The school is governed by a Board of Trustees.

The trustees express their aim for the pupils at the end of their education at the school as being, *'self-disciplined young men and women with knowledge, skills and qualifications that show they have achieved their full potential'* and *'to provide for the varied needs of students in a safe, secure and stimulating environment, and to give them a solid educational grounding'*.

Summary of main findings:

Highfield School has made remarkable progress since it opened its doors to its pupils for the first time in September 2009, thanks to the hard work of the school's management, staff, trustees, parents and the local Brethren community. The good quality of education provided is reflected in the good progress made by pupils in relation to their abilities, including those identified as needing additional support. Pupils' achievements are strongly supported by the generally high quality of teaching. School managers and trustees work well together and have a clear vision and understanding as to how the school can be improved further. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and has a number of important strengths which reflect the aims of the school and the community for their children's pastoral development. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory, although new

staff have yet to undertake child protection training. Pupils say they like being at the school and they appreciate the support they receive from their teachers. Their behaviour is excellent and they demonstrate good communication and social skills relative to their ages. This is the school's first published report since it opened on its current site. The school meets most of the regulations for independent schools.

What the school does well:

- relationships between pupils and teachers are good;
- teachers plan their lessons effectively to encourage pupils' engagement and to ensure a good pace of learning;
- lessons are frequently lively, with examples of excellent questioning and a variety of teaching strategies used effectively;
- the moral and social development of pupils are particular strengths;
- assessment is good and there are effective strategies for further improvement; and
- pupils relate very well to each other and exhibit strong collaborative skills in lessons.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- ensure that all new staff receive training in child protection (3(2)(b));
- ensure that medical checks are completed for all staff and volunteers (4(2)(a)); and
- ensure that heating is adequate in the primary department at all times 5(p).

Next Steps:

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the quality of school reports so that pupils are clear about achievement in each subject and what they need to do to make further progress.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provided in both the primary and secondary departments is good. It provides pupils of all ages and abilities with a suitably wide range of opportunities to learn effectively and to make good progress. The curriculum in both parts of the school is guided by the schemes of work published by the Focus Learning Trust (FLT), the National Curriculum and by additional subject planning completed by teachers to meet specific school expectations as set out by the school management. Medium and long term plans are good and provide effective support to the thorough planning which generally underpins individual lessons. Schemes of work clearly set out subject aims, the content of lessons, necessary teaching strategies, the resources that are needed and opportunities for assessment.

In the primary department (Key Stage 2) all the subjects of the National Curriculum are taught. The curriculum is extended effectively with French and German, and Bible Studies which is taught by appropriately trained volunteers. Lessons are planned thoroughly, and are presented well, offering interesting activities. Provision for aspects of physical education, which includes swimming, is difficult to match appropriately to the age range of boys and girls in groups from Year 3 to Year 6. Mixed age groups are taught according to FLT guidance on a two year cycle, to ensure that pupils do not repeat the same work. As the school opened in the second part of the cycle, thoughtful strategies have been employed by the school to ensure that pupils in Years 4 and 6 do not have gaps in their learning. The school is determined to build on the advantage of having the primary and secondary pupils on the same site, and initial arrangements to support a smooth transition when they move between departments are either established or firmly planned. Secondary teachers already teach in science, personal, social and health education (PSHE), music, design and technology, citizenship and art, and plans are firmly in place for Year 6 to be taught mathematics in the secondary school from the spring term of 2010.

Pupils in the secondary department have access to a suitable range of learning opportunities, which include all the National curriculum subjects, as well as a suitable range of subjects to examination level. In Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, pupils have experience of chemistry, biology and physics, with the opportunity for the most able to take additional science to examination level. The humanities are well represented, with pupils taking history, geography and citizenship. In Key Stage 3 all pupils study art, music and drama. In Key Stage 4 the curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities for taking subjects, including business studies, to examination level, except that art and music are not available. Nevertheless, suitable opportunities are provided for creative work through textiles and graphics courses, and art is available as a GCSE course in the sixth form. Opportunities for creative work will be further extended when the new workshop facilities are completed. There are good opportunities for studying modern foreign languages throughout the school. The good start pupils receive in modern foreign languages in Key Stage 2 is extended to the secondary department, where all Key Stage 3 pupils take both French and German. Most pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow courses in both French and German, with German GCSE examinations being taken at the end

of Year 10, and French at the end of Year 11. All pupils in the secondary department take PSHE, Bible Studies, PE, and information and communication technology (ICT).

Pupils in Years 12 and 13 say that they are content with the range of subjects they have the opportunity to study. Despite the small size of the sixth form, their curriculum provides a reasonable range of vocational and academic options in both years. Nevertheless, the school is aware of the need to expand academic options in Year 13. In addition to subjects available as examination options, sixth formers have the opportunity of studying a range of GCSE or non-examination courses, for example, biomedical science, current affairs and business studies.

Provision for PSHE and citizenship is good and pupils study both courses throughout the school with the exception of Year 13. The citizenship course is notably well planned. Although PE and games are available to all pupils of compulsory school age, the time for these activities has been reduced on the new school site. The school is actively seeking to find a suitable sports field or alternative sports venue, but a number of pupils, in particular in Key Stages 3 and 4, commented on their disappointment at their currently reduced opportunities for games. Sixth formers would like more opportunity for sports activities. There is appropriate careers education, and pupils in Year 11 take part in a week of work experience.

Provision for pupils with special learning needs is good and promotes their good progress. The school identifies pupils who are gifted or talented and who require additional challenge, as well as those who need special support for learning. Procedures for identifying learning needs are thorough throughout the school, and pupils are identified early. Each pupil has a well prepared individual education plan (IEP) with appropriately set targets. Class and subject teachers are provided with copies of IEPs to guide their planning. This enables them to liaise effectively with support staff to monitor progress. The IEPs are reviewed each term and adapted as necessary. Pupils are given individual support or work in small groups with well-trained support staff who have a clear understanding of each pupil's needs and who work well with teachers in lessons. In addition, a specialist teacher visits the school once a week and helps pupils who experience specific reading and writing difficulties. Most teachers identify within their planning the gifted or talented pupils who require additional challenge and provide them with suitable opportunities to extend their learning, particularly in Key Stage 4.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching throughout the school is good and it has some outstanding features. Lesson planning in both the primary and secondary departments is thorough and conscientious. Lessons are well structured and plans identify what the pupils will learn, with objectives written on the boards at the beginning of the lesson. Plenary sessions at the end of lessons are used effectively to check up on what pupils have learned. Teachers are well-qualified throughout the school. They plan interesting activities to motivate the pupils, and there is a high degree of participation by pupils in lessons. Excellent questioning is used to assess understanding, and a variety of teaching strategies engages the pupils' interest.

Teachers focus appropriately on enabling pupils to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. They encourage the pupils to think for themselves and build upon their previous learning. Pupils say that teachers explain things clearly

which helps them to make progress. In both the primary and secondary departments, pupils say that they are making good progress because they receive individual attention when they need it.

In the best lessons, pupils experience stimulating activities and challenging tasks, working effectively together. For example, in an English and drama lesson in Year 8 the teacher's lively manner helped to generate pace and interest. The pupils were able to identify key factors that influence performance, and worked together excellently to prepare for a production of a particular episode in 'Treasure Island'. In a science lesson in Year 9 on improving health, the teacher posed challenging questions to hypothesise 'What if?', which challenged pupils to think independently. The lesson clearly identified the features of a healthy lifestyle. The resulting sensible and relevant questions and answers indicate that the pupils had made good progress in their understanding.

Teachers' classroom management skills are of a high order which enables lessons to proceed smoothly. Most set a good pace to lessons, which start and finish promptly. However, in a small number of lessons, learning progressed at a slow pace because the tasks did not sufficiently challenge the pupils. Overall, staff set high expectations to which pupils respond positively. Learning is supported throughout the school by attractive displays of pupils' work, celebrating both their achievements and materials related to the subject or topic.

Pupils work well together in pairs and small groups and they enjoy the opportunity to discuss their ideas with their peers. Each pupil has a homework planner and diary, which additionally provides a good form of communication with parents; parents are encouraged to write comments. Homework is used effectively to extend the pupils' learning. The good relationships that exist between staff and pupils promote the pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Generally, there is a relaxed and constructive working atmosphere throughout the school, promoted by teachers and appreciated by pupils.

Assessment is good throughout the school and shows a number of strong features. The assessment strategies that are established and those that are in the process of development reflect the school's aim of promoting the best practice. Development has been already supported by staff training, and one to one pupil interviews have already begun for older pupils as part of the overall strategy. Assessment is supported by a clear framework and policies for both assessment and marking. Strategies have begun to be integrated between the primary and secondary parts of the school.

Procedures for assessment in the primary department are good. The pupils are assessed on entry using tests recommended by the FLT. The teachers have administered further tests to provide information on pupils whilst they await the results of the baseline assessments. Assessments are planned to take place throughout the school year for all Key Stage 2 pupils. These cover progress in English and mathematics, spelling and reading. The mathematics scheme also provides half-termly assessments to monitor progress. Data derived from the tests enables teachers and senior management to track progress over time. Teachers continuously assess work in lessons on a day-to-day basis and keep detailed records. The teacher in charge has regular meetings with the head teacher to review the progress pupils make.

Marking and feedback in the secondary department are often of a very high standard. In such cases teachers' written feedback in exercise books clearly indicates what was good about the piece of work and what can be done to make improvements. The development of the use of learning targets for pupils, which aim to guide them to understand clearly what they need to do to make progress, in relation to their own abilities, is an important new step in raising standards further. Despite the school's clearly expressed guidance of approaches to marking and feedback it is still occasionally of inconsistent quality in the secondary department. The school is currently in the process of reassessing its marking policy.

In the secondary department teachers record their assessments of pupils work in 'the Big Green Folder' kept in the staff room. This ensures that a good central record of pupils' progress based on their ability is accessible and updated by teachers regularly. Although the system established has many strengths, strategies to ensure the flow of specific information derived from the data to teachers are still being developed. Reports available in the secondary department do not yet reflect the school's high aspirations and aims for assessment, although they contain reference to National Curriculum levels.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good, with some outstanding features. The school is successful in helping pupils to develop their confidence and self-esteem. Teachers know their pupils well and ensure praise for good achievement by pupils of all abilities. The support they receive gives them encouragement and belief in their own abilities, which is evident in their work and behaviour. Assemblies also contribute through themes based on 'taking a positive view of life' and 'everybody is special'.

By the time pupils come to the school, they have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong and have respect for the law. This is further developed as they move through the school. Visits to the Galleries of Justice and the Holocaust Exhibition, help to consolidate pupils' understanding of the importance of fairness justice and respect for the law. Assemblies deal with topics such as caring, respect, the importance of working together and of community. Work in a variety of subjects further enhances pupils' moral development, through consideration of topics such as prejudice and stereotyping, the work of environmental groups and respect and understanding in a multi-faith society.

Pupils are encouraged strongly to accept responsibility for their behaviour and to be aware of their social responsibilities, reinforcing the values of the community. The school ethos, the expectations of teachers and the school's behaviour policy, are founded on these principles and the excellent behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school help to create a friendly and orderly society. Assemblies led by pupils provide opportunities to contribute to the life of the school in another way, such as exploring courage. Citizenship projects have also provided good opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility, such as the Fair Trade projects that Year 9 pupils researched and then presented to Year 7 and 8 pupils, and the Law and Crime day, organised by Year 10. An orienteering day organised by older pupils highlighted the importance of teamwork and collaboration in a 'real life' situation. As

a result, social as well as moral development is a significant strength of the school's provision.

Through the citizenship programme in particular, pupils develop a good understanding of public institutions and services in England. Visits by police officers and the visits to Broxtowe Council House and the local fire station, for example, inform pupils about local services, whilst the visit of the local MP and that to the Houses of Parliament inform pupils about national government. Fund-raising activities emphasise the important role that Voluntary Organisations play in the life of local communities and the wider world. The school works hard to develop appreciation and respect for other cultures and traditions. Citizenship again plays an important part, but other subjects also make significant contributions, such as poetry of other cultures in English and the exploration of prejudice, revenge and religious intolerance in the Merchant of Venice in the GCSE course. French and German provide valuable insights into life in two other European Union countries, and geography looks at factors influencing the ethnic diversity of British society and contrasting urban societies in developed and developing countries.

Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being because they are helped to be effective communicators. Work in PSHE, looks at issues such as the use of budgets to control personal expenditure, understanding savings and the financial problems affecting society. The business orientated courses that are very popular with older pupils extend and develop their economic and industrial understanding and enhance these through visits to local businesses such as Toyota.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Pupils are well cared for by staff and feel happy and secure in the school. Pastoral care in the school is good. Teachers know their pupils very well. In the senior part of the school, a formal role for the form tutor has been introduced recently and is still being developed, through staff development and a structured programme of activities in tutor time. This role is seen as key to the close monitoring of pupils' personal well-being and academic progress, including the tracking of pupils' academic progress and response. Similar systems are being developed in the junior school, with class teachers as the key figures. The rapid integration of pupils from various schools in the primary department to create a cohesive community reflects very well on the quality of pastoral care and the caring ethos of the school. In the secondary department, the senior manager with responsibility for health and welfare exercises increasingly close oversight of pastoral care, as does the senior teacher in the primary department.

The school has detailed strategies supported by clear policies and guidance to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils, although at the time of the inspection, new staff had still to complete child protection training. The planning for outside visits is thorough, and includes all the necessary risk assessments. They have also been carried out for all the relevant in-school activities where there is an element of risk. A detailed fire risk assessment has been carried out by a member of the Brethren community with appropriate expertise, and issues identified as a result of this assessment have been addressed. The fire drill so far conducted shows that the

school evacuated swiftly. The school has had no formal inspection by the local Fire Authority since moving to the new premises. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 as amended.

The school has a satisfactory first aid policy, staff are deployed well in lessons, at break and lunch-times and before and after school, so that pupils are properly supervised at all times. Records of sanctions imposed on serious disciplinary offences are in place, but have not yet been used. Admissions and attendance records are in order and meet the relevant requirements.

The school educates pupils about healthy lifestyles in science, where nutrition, exercise and how the body copes with disease are three key areas. In PE the importance of health-related exercise is addressed, but the lack of a playing field reduces the range of activities available. This is a consequence of moving to the new school and trustees are active in seeking to rent a field for sports' purposes. Cookery provides pupils with information about healthy eating habits as well as opportunities for pupils to learn the skills of preparing healthy and nutritious meals.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools' standards Regulations 2003, the school should:

- *ensure that all new staff receive training in child protection paragraph 3(2)(b)).*

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is aware of the importance of completing CRB checks on all new staff and volunteers. A register of all checks completed is kept by the school. However, the school was not able to provide evidence that medical checks for all staff have been completed.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

In order to comply fully with the Independent Schools' standards Regulations 2003, the school should:

- *ensure that medical checks are completed for all staff and volunteers (paragraph 4(2)(a)).*

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is situated in pleasant well-maintained grounds and buildings that are in excellent condition and have good facilities, providing a pleasant and inviting learning environment for pupils. The refurbished buildings offer a good range of specialist rooms, including two science laboratories, an ICT suite, an art room and a hall with facilities for PE. The establishment of the primary department on the same site

supports the school's aim of ensuring a smooth transition for pupils between Key Stage 2 and the secondary curriculum. There are sufficient washrooms and changing facilities and a room for pupils who may become ill during the school day is conveniently placed near to the school office to aid their supervision.

All aspects of the furnishings have been carefully considered, but the lack of heating in the primary department on Monday mornings during inclement weather when ovens are on to provide pupils with a hot lunch, is likely on cold mornings to produce classrooms that are unacceptably cold for pupils and staff. There are sufficient access and exit points in the building, but the school reports that its status as a building of historic interest has prevented the incorporation of emergency fire bars on doors.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No

What does the school need to do in order to fully meet the requirements?

- *Remedy the lack of heating in the junior school on Monday morning; (paragraph 5(p));*

The quality of information for parents

All the relevant information is contained in Secondary and Primary Handbooks which are issued to all parents of existing and prospective pupils. In addition interesting and informative quarterly illustrated newsletters are prepared by Year 10 and 11 pupils as part of their work towards their certificate of personal effectiveness (COPE) tasks, as part of their ASDAN course. This is issued to all parents and includes reports on educational visits, fundraising activities, new staff appointments and other helpful information. Staff maintain frequent contact with parents, and parent/teacher meetings are planned throughout the year. Reports are provided to parents twice each academic year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school has adopted the Focus Learning Trust policy for complaints which fully meets the requirement. It is included in full in the school prospectus.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The school is governed by the board of the Trent Valley Education Trust consisting at the time of the inspection of six trustees. The board are committed to upholding a strong Christian ethos, complying with all charity and other regulations, and following the FLT guidance.

The board meets each month to discuss strategies, staffing issues and finance, and to review performance, set targets and consider the care and interests of all stakeholders. Thorough minutes are prepared and distributed to all trustees. The charity is well run and is delivering its aims and objectives. Trustees are dedicated to the advancement of the school and care of the pupils. All trustees have specific managerial duties allocated and they work well together and communicate with each other frequently.

School Management

The board has delegated responsibility for the management of the school to one trustee, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the head teacher. They form an effective partnership. The CEO is responsible for communicating board decisions to the staff, and the head teacher attends board meetings. The CEO is in school for a full day each week and has weekly management meetings with the head teacher, minutes of which are distributed to all trustees. He meets and discusses issues with other staff and pupils, including those in the primary department. He is in contact with the school on a daily basis and the result of his hard work is seen in the workmanlike atmosphere evident during the inspection. Further effectiveness now rests on increased delegation and reporting back.

The head teacher joined the school in September bringing many years' experience in headship which is being used skilfully. He works well with other staff and has introduced effective practices. He has a definite commitment to improve the quality of the teaching and learning in the school. Administrative work is delegated to a management team which includes the senior teacher in the primary department. The "one school" approach of working with the primary department has commenced in an encouraging manner.

The senior teacher of the primary department reports to the head teacher and meets with him weekly. She also has weekly contact with the primary trustee and minutes are kept of these meetings. A pleasant, lively and stimulating atmosphere has quickly been established in the primary department. The primary trustee has been closely involved in the setting up of the primary section and is enthusiastically and practically committed to the progress of the Key Stage 2 pupils.

Ethos and Pastoral Care

An enthusiastic, friendly but workmanlike atmosphere was seen amongst pupils during the inspection. Pastoral care is provided by a trustee and supported by the

management and staff. All year groups have a form tutor whom they meet at the start of each school day. Whole school assemblies are held twice each week. Behaviour and discipline are managed successfully. The Focus ethos is implemented carefully throughout the school.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

- the management of paperwork could be more thorough;
- improved delegation and reporting back would add to the CEO's effectiveness.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk