

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:	Highview
DfE number: FOCUS number:	356/6030 211 (secondary) 200 (primary)
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mr Mike Thirkell Supporting Inspectors: Mrs Cecil Corfield Mr Simon Bennett Mrs Meg Buckingham Lay Inspector: Mr Douglas Siderfin
Dates of inspection:	8-11 November 2010

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Highview

Address of school: 237 Didsbury Road, Heaton Norris,
Stockport, SK4 2AA

Telephone number: 0161 975 9323

Fax number: 0161 432 7991

Email address: highview@focus-school.com

Proprietor: Mereside Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer: Mr Alistair Simpson

Name of Head Teacher: Mr Karl Said
Name of Senior Teacher (primary): Mrs Ruth Plant

DfE number: 356/6030

FOCUS number: 211 (secondary) 200 (primary)

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

Age range of pupils and students: 7-18

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 64 Girls: 75

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 16 Girls: 14

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: Boys: 2 Girls: 2

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 Simon Bennett
Mrs Meg Buckingham

Lay Inspector: Mr Douglas Siderfin

Dates of inspection: 8-11 November 2010

SECTION 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 Education (DfE). 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:

The school was established in 2007 on its present prominent site in Heaton Norris overlooking the conurbation of Stockport. It is registered with the DfE as an independent school of special religious character. Mereside School was amalgamated in September 2010 with Riverside Study Centre, formerly situated in Liverpool, to form Highview School. The primary department, previously known as Mereside Primary School, has been part of the school since September 2008. The school's additional primary Highview campus in Crewe (formerly known as Willowview) is separately registered with the DfE and was not part of this inspection. There are 139 boys and girls currently attending. Of these, 37 are in the primary department and 30 in the sixth form. A total of 29 pupils are identified by the school as having special learning needs and 22 as particularly gifted or talented. Four pupils have statements of special learning needs. Pupils who attend the school travel mainly from Stockport, Manchester, Crewe, Chester and Liverpool.

The school prospectus clearly states the Trustees of the school's commitment to ensuring *'that all aspects of school life are in accord with the Holy Bible'*. School aims are expressed as: *'to provide a broad-based quality curriculum designed to 'stretch' pupils according to their ability; to ensure that each pupil fulfils his or her potential, so as to be well equipped for future responsibilities; to support pupils to become motivated, mature, self-disciplined and effective managers of themselves and their finances; and, to be able to think morally, logically and clearly'*.

Summary of main findings:

Highview School provides its pupils with a good quality of education. Pupils of all abilities make good progress as they move through the school. This is supported by the overall good results achieved by pupils in public examinations at the end of Year 11. The joining of Mereside Secondary and Primary Schools on one site, followed relatively quickly by the amalgamation with the Riverside Study Centre has presented trustees, managers and staff with significant challenges, but has been completed successfully. All concerned acknowledge that there is still much to do to consolidate the immense changes. Curriculum provision is good overall, although the need for further development is acknowledged. The school's development has benefited from the hard work and support of teachers and the community as a whole.

Teaching is good and often of outstanding quality. Teachers have risen to the challenge of ensuring continuity of curriculum provision in examination courses that resulted from the amalgamation. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall with important strengths. Welfare is good, pupils are well cared for and all matters relating to safeguarding are in place. Behaviour is good overall and attendance is above the national average. The school has attended to all matters raised previously as issues during the inspections of both schools in 2007 and 2008 respectively and meets all the regulations for independent schools. A material change inspection on behalf of the DfE was conducted at the same time as the school inspection.

What the school does well:

- it has staff and trustees who work well together to support pupils' learning and school development; there is a strong sense of mutual support;
- it has established exceptionally good relationships between staff and pupils and pupils are quick to acknowledge the good quality of teaching; and
- it provides very strong support for pupils with statements of special needs.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

The school meets all the requirements of the recent Equality Act legislation, which includes the DDA requirements.

Next Steps:

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

- ensure that all policies and documents are reviewed, signed and dated annually;
- strengthen further links between the primary and secondary sections of the school to confirm the advantages provided by the amalgamation; and
- provide more opportunities for older pupils to take responsibility within the school through, for example, building on the strengths of the citizenship programme.

SECTION B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

PART 1 - The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

Curricular provision is good throughout the school and meets the needs of pupils of all ages and abilities. It provides a suitably broad range of learning experiences that enable all pupils to make good progress in literacy, mathematics, science, technology, physical and personal development and in aesthetic and creative awareness.

The curriculum for primary pupils follows a two-year cycle based on guidance provided by the Focus Learning Trust (FLT). It is effectively planned to meet the needs of pupils in mixed age-group classes. Good emphasis is placed on literacy and numeracy in specific lessons, but care is also taken to develop these skills in all areas of the curriculum. Science, geography, history, music, art, design technology (DT) and physical education (PE) are taught, and opportunities for learning and personal development are extended effectively through personal, social and health education (PSHE), French and citizenship. Curricular planning is supported effectively through the close co-operation of the primary teachers who meet together each week, for example, to ensure the appropriate coverage of history and geography in half-termly blocks. Opportunities to develop constructive procedures to support the transition of pupils between primary and secondary parts of the school have begun, and strategies and procedures for ensuring good communication between them are developing positively. Some secondary teachers are already involved in teaching PSHE, French, music and games to the primary pupils. The effective course in PSHE is taught throughout the school each week based on guidance provided by Focus Learning. Projects in some subjects begun in the primary department are continued into Year 7, the pupils' first year of secondary education. This already represents a positive feature of the amalgamation and such positive initiatives are confirmed by the school as an area for ongoing development.

Pupils' learning experience in the primary department is supported by a range of interesting practical and other activities on Friday afternoons, for example through cooking simple dishes, gardening, card making, knitting and sewing. These activities provide pupils with the opportunity to enjoy working with parents and grandparents as well as with their teachers. Keeping hens, rabbits and guinea pigs promotes opportunities for pupils to take responsibility through caring for the animals, and they express their pleasure at having such an opportunity. Opportunities provided by visitors to the school and out-of-school visits further enrich and extend their learning experiences.

From Years 7 to 9 the curriculum includes all National Curriculum (NC) subjects. Learning opportunities are enhanced through the provision of both French and German, citizenship, music, office skills, Bible studies and games. Office skills, which includes information and communication technology (ICT), reflects the school's strong emphasis on developing business-related competencies. Pupils have good opportunities for practical and creative learning through specialist facilities for art, DT, textiles and cooking. The total provision emphasises the importance placed by the school on providing all pupils with access to all areas of the curriculum. Pupils take GCSE courses in English, English literature, mathematics, science, history, geography, French, business studies, office practice, citizenship and art, and

the school encourages all pupils in the development and practice of music skills. Currently, boys take DT in resistant materials and the girls take an FLT textiles course. For this year only, because of variations in examination syllabuses taken by pupils in the two former schools, graphics and food and nutrition courses are offered to enable pupils from Riverside to complete their courses. Able pupils study German as well as French. Additional support is provided for pupils with special learning needs during German lesson times and at lunchtimes. Pupils who are identified as being able will sit the GCSE examinations early this year.

The school provides a suitable range of academic and vocational subjects for post-16 students. The amalgamation of the two schools has extended the curriculum choice available to students in Years 12 and 13. This is acknowledged by the sixth-form students as a positive feature. Nevertheless the school is seeking ways to improve further the range and balance of the sixth-form provision, in particular, with respect to vocational subjects, to improve further its ability to tailor courses to meet the individual learning needs of students of varying abilities and aptitudes. In Year 12, pupils study three or four subjects at AS level and continue with Bible Studies, PSHE and games. Students taking an academic pathway must include English language and mathematics in their AS level choices. The range of options for academic students includes challenging subjects such as law and vocational courses, which provide a range of opportunities for the less academically inclined, include horticulture, office practice and construction. In Year 13, students study up to four advanced level subjects, in addition to Bible Studies, PSHE and games. Year 12 and 13 also have a weekly music lesson. An imaginative City and Guilds certificated course in culinary skills is provided. The school maintains well organised video-conferencing links with three other FLT schools in AS business studies, three times a week to the Hague, and link with AS mathematics lessons from Aberdeen three times a week.

The school provides a good range of enrichment activities linked to the curriculum, although after-school extra-curricular opportunities are inevitably constrained due to the distances travelled by many pupils. All pupils from Year 7 to Year 11 are in the school choir and practise weekly. This term, Year 9 have visited Ramshaw Rocks as part of their art course, Year 11 went to Castleton to conduct a geographical population survey and Years 11, 12 and 13 are to visit the British Museum and Imperial War museum as part of an English and history study. Provision for careers guidance and work experience is suitable with some strong features including a range of visiting speakers. Pupils in Year 10 have a week's work experience in the Easter half-term provided by a range of Brethren employers. The school intends to develop this experience. A well-organised and well-attended careers guidance event is provided by trustees.

Strategies to support pupils with special learning needs within the curriculum are good with some very strong features. The school has a clear framework in place which guides the support provided for pupils identified as having special learning needs. Strategies for providing support both within the classroom and through withdrawal lessons are guided by the special needs co-ordinator who has oversight of this support throughout the school. This ensures continuity in the strategies used and ensures that data and other information relating to pupils' individual needs are maintained as they progress through the school. Detailed records and individual education plans (IEPs) are carefully maintained. Information from these is used strategically to provide details of the particular learning needs of each pupil and summaries of their specific needs are provided to class and subject teachers as a guide to their planning. Although both are valuable documents for identifying need,

they sometimes provide too little guidance for teachers about the procedures required for providing support. Nevertheless, extensive and well maintained records of pupils with special needs over a period of time confirm that they make good progress relative to their abilities and learning difficulties. Documentation relating to statements of special educational needs is thorough and records are very well maintained. Pupils' statements are detailed and these, along with their IEPs and other aspects of the provision, receive much valued support from the placing local authorities (LAs). Reviews of statements are regular, attended by an appropriate LA officer and appropriately recorded. Good liaison between the special needs co-ordinator and class teachers is supported by regular informal contacts helped by the small size of the school, but there is no formal arrangement for these meetings.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall. It is outstanding in a significant minority of lessons across the curriculum. Teachers work hard to support pupils at all levels. Pupils of all ages are keen to express their recognition of the high quality of teaching that they experience. The high quality of teaching is significant in ensuring the good progress made by pupils of all ages and abilities, including those who have varying degrees of special learning needs.

Teachers throughout the school are well qualified and experienced in the subjects and at the levels they teach. They are effectively supported by teaching assistants where these are deployed. The range of styles and strategies adopted by teachers in lessons throughout the school is an important contributory factor in ensuring that pupils at all levels have good opportunities for intellectual development, to extend their knowledge and to develop their subject skills. Teaching generally encourages pupils to show a clear interest in learning. Group work is frequently used effectively, for example to encourage pupils to think independently and to develop their views on aspects of their work using previous knowledge. For example, in a Year 7 lesson pupils' knowledge of the school was used well as a focus for group discussions of health and safety issues. On those occasions where individual pupil's concentration lapsed, teachers in general used effective classroom management strategies to re-engage them.

Lessons are generally well planned and structured. The best lessons demonstrate a very high level of planning with the structure and progression of learning considered carefully. For example, throughout the primary department good planning emphasised the importance of developing pupils' vocabulary. In secondary classes otherwise careful planning does not always show details of how the learning needs of individual pupils will be met; nevertheless, because of the generally small class sizes, good and regular opportunities are ensured for teachers to speak with individual pupils. Teachers use questioning well not only to challenge the most able to think creatively but also to support and encourage less able or less confident pupils. For example, in a Year 12 accounting group, questioning was used effectively to assess the students' understanding of a piece of completed work. Teaching is generally supported by a good range of resources throughout the school, although appropriate text books were on occasion not yet available to some secondary pupils. Good use is made of digital projectors in general to support teaching, although they are not available in all classrooms.

The quality of assessment is generally good. A clear framework for assessment has been established and assessments have been completed at all levels to enable the school to compare its performance against its own aims and against national norms.

Strategies for assessment are supported by the regular training and guidance for staff. Each subject provides guidance on how assessment should take place and good records of pupils' progress are retained by teachers within each subject area. The generally good quality of assessment is also supported by the small size of classes which provides opportunities for teachers to speak to pupils individually about their progress. The school has assessment and marking policies in place which make clear reference to the school's broad expectations. Where appropriate, teachers' marking makes helpful references to NC levels and for older pupils, reference to projected examination grades. Although the overall quality of marking is good and undertaken regularly, with a number of outstanding examples of written feedback to pupils relative to their ages, there are occasions when the schools' expressed expectations relating to marking and feedback were not followed.

Tests taken when pupils join the school combined with observations made by teachers ensure a good base-line of information. The school has good strategies for monitoring the progress made by pupils. The range of data and other information about pupils' progress is used well to inform teaching and to monitor the progress of pupils. The school has clear strategies established for providing a more centralised system for the storage and use of information aimed at further improving the monitoring of pupils progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 2 - The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development overall is good. The trustees believe that the family and the extended Brethren community are central to and have responsibility for their children's spiritual development practised within a Biblical context. This is complemented in school with Bible studies lessons taught by members of the Brethren community so that pupils have a good grounding in knowledge of the Christian scriptures and how this relates to their own lives. Daily prayers and scripture readings are usually led by the school manager and on occasions this duty is undertaken by older students.

Pupils experience a very strong emphasis on the fostering of good moral attitudes and strong relationships within the family and the religious community governed by Biblical teachings. Throughout the school they develop a good sense of what is right and wrong and know what is expected of them in this regard. During the inspection, behaviour in lessons and around the school was seen to be good. Clear guidance is given to pupils about taking responsibility for their own actions and words. However, the school is clear that there have been occasional lapses in behaviour related to tensions following the amalgamation. In response, the school is actively seeking ways to provide opportunities for older pupils in particular to develop further their sense of personal responsibility within the context of the new school.

Pupils grow in confidence as they move through the school; they are polite and courteous to visitors. Relationships throughout the school are notably positive and pupils collaborate well in lessons and are considerate towards each other. Pupils say that they enjoy being at the school and that it is a friendly place to be. They appreciate the encouragement staff give them to succeed and this helps them grow in self-confidence and self-esteem.

Primary pupils make a good contribution to school life by readily taking responsibility for their environment. They enjoy tending the garden, growing vegetables and caring for the rabbits, hens and guinea pigs. Class monitors and prefects help the orderly running day to day. There are fewer planned opportunities at secondary level for older pupils to take on responsibility within the school. Nevertheless, pupils in general show developing responsibility and concern through their involvement in musical events and fundraising for charities such as the British Heart Foundation and the Alzheimer's Society and cancer relief that they chose themselves. The well-established citizenship programme and the dynamic way in which it is taught exemplifies the positive opportunities that pupils have for developing skills of team work and being reliant on each other to complete a task. Through such activities pupils make a contribution to the school and wider community. A recent Year 11 citizenship project involved a visit to the local air ambulance base. Pupils spoke knowledgeably about the experience and what they had learned. As a result they have worked well as a team to organise fund raising to support the air ambulance as part of their GCSE course work in citizenship. The primary and secondary parts of the school each have a school council. The newly elected school council in the secondary part of the school is welcomed by pupils as an opportunity for expressing their views and becoming involved more widely in the school. A number of students in Years 12 and 13 expressed frustration at not having sufficient opportunity to take on responsibilities that would contribute to the whole school community.

Throughout the school pupils have ample opportunities to learn about the services and institutions in England in both the voluntary and public sectors. Through citizenship and humanities lessons they are able to gain a good understanding of the democratic process. The recent school council election for pupils from Years 7 to 11 provided first-hand knowledge of how these processes work in a relevant situation. Visitors come to school to explain their services, for example, the fire service and charities give presentations to explain their work.

Pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being. Economic awareness is a strong feature of their background and pupils go on to work in family businesses. Courses in business, economics and accounts are well established and popular with older pupils. They make good progress in developing the personal qualities that will stand them in good stead for working and adult life. Pupils are secure in their understanding of their country's culture as well as their faith within the family and Brethren community. Throughout the curriculum, for example in humanities, history, English, art and modern foreign languages, pupils are made aware of a range of other cultures and ways of life. In imaginative French lessons pupils have experienced a 'café' environment, complete with croissants, and in German lessons they have been made aware of traditional German Christmas markets. Pupils support for charities such as Water Aid helps them to become aware of those less fortunate than themselves and how others live in other parts of the world. Within the curriculum there are topics, for example within citizenship and history, which provide appropriate opportunities to develop an understanding of the different ethnic heritages that make up Britain today.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 3 - The welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety and safeguarding are good. Procedures and practice relating to their welfare are appropriately in place and carried out thoroughly and conscientiously. Pupils say that they are well-cared for and that they feel safe in school. All necessary policies are in place, including those relating to the safeguarding of young people. However, some established policies do not show a sufficiently recent review date. Checks to ensure compliance with fire regulations are carried out regularly and conscientiously. Fire drills are carried out and suitably recorded appropriately each half-term. Records show regular inspections of the kitchen facilities by an environmental health officer.

The school has an anti-bullying policy and care is taken to ensure that it is known by all pupils. The school has dealt successfully with isolated instances of bullying and has sought to address any underlying issues. Pupils, who confirm that bullying is rare, know to whom they should turn were it necessary. Pupils are encouraged to develop healthy lifestyles through PSHE, science and physical education, and all pupils develop a positive view of diet through cookery lessons. Healthy snacks are encouraged and drinking water is freely available. The thorough range of guidance provided through the PSHE programme ensures that they receive helpful guidance in respect to the dangers of drugs and alcohol. The school undertakes regular and appropriate health and safety reviews, although the records are not always consistently clear in the detail they provide regarding the actions taken. The school has a written first aid policy and has sufficient staff qualified to provide first aid. The admission and attendance registers are kept appropriately.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 4 - Suitability of the staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school now complies with all regulations relevant to the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors. The school has only recently made use of supply staff, and contact has been made with the relevant agency to ensure that all regulations have been fulfilled. The central register meets all requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 5 - Suitability of the premises and accommodation

Premises and accommodation at Highview are fit for purpose. The accommodation, previously used as a school, has been extended and enhanced imaginatively through the use of a range of demountable buildings. The merger of the two schools has, in this area, been effectively and carefully accomplished. Space is used to good purpose on a potentially challenging hillside site. Care has been taken over access and egress for pupils and for staff and for vehicles. The facilities for the secondary and primary departments are on one site adjacent to each other, and this supports the development of transition strategies. The amenities include rooms of a range of sizes that are used to good effect for assembly, teaching, rest and relaxation, reading and research, access to ICT, art and music, and cooking and DT. The size of the age groups varies, and the school has scope for flexibility of use,

should the need arise. Displays for art are used to good effect. Facilities for those who are ill are adequate and meet requirements. The demountable classroom buildings at the top of the site are not entirely soundproof, although it did not cause disruption to teaching during the inspection.

There are on-site play areas, both hard-surface and grassed. The site has been well planted and landscaped, and the overall environment is stimulating and well maintained. Clear attention is paid to detail, as, for instance, in the striking colour of the waste bins to brighten the site's overall appearance. The school is clean and tidy, and the pupils respect their environment. The quality of the environment is emphasised by the facilities provided for horticulture, which include the polytunnel, the raised bed area on the primary site, with its autumn planting of broad beans and peas, the hen coops and the rabbit hutches. The provision for cooking is outstanding and immaculately maintained. Chemicals are carefully secured in the science laboratory.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 6 - The quality of information for parents

The quality of information provided for parents is good. All required information is fully covered in the school prospectus and handbook. The information is indexed and shown either in full, condensed, or noted as being available from the school on request. Information provided to parents includes that relating to child protection, anti-bullying procedures, health and safety and expectations with respect to behaviour.

Letters sent out at least fortnightly are followed up with a colourful news-sheet called the 'Bugle' which is produced monthly. The primary school send out their own news-sheet each half-term. Detailed reports about pupils' progress are sent to parents twice annually. The quality of reports to parents is good overall, but some subject reports are less specific in clarifying what pupils have achieved and what they need to do to improve further. The school maintains close contact with local authorities with respect to pupils with statements of special learning needs. The school provides suitable information in relation to statements of special learning needs to the responsible, appropriate local authorities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART 7 - The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school has adopted the Focus Learning complaints policy, modified to meet the specific needs of the school. It meets the requirements in all respects.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SECTION C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT, AND MAINTENANCE OF THE ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

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

Considering the heavy task of amalgamating two secondary schools only seven weeks previously (and earlier a primary school), the management, staff, parents and pupils are succeeding extremely well in establishing the new school. The trustees, the head teacher and the staff are collaborating closely day by day, putting in place the necessary structures, and it is clear that almost all aspects of the school are already established and functioning. However, at the moment it is not always clear where responsibility begins or ends for the individuals involved. There is a general atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect between trustees and staff. The classrooms are excellent and the facilities are good and well thought out within the physical restraints of the site.

The head teacher and school manager manifest a dedicated attitude; they are responsible for the daily running of the school and both carry the organisation in every aspect, while the CEO provides an excellent lead through keeping a very close eye on all that is proceeding. The primary department flourishes under its senior teacher and is working with the secondary department with a view to a seamless transition through the year groups.

Very regular and diverse managerial and staff meetings (at appropriate levels) are held and suitably minuted. The staff are fully supportive of the management, enabling an excellent atmosphere to pervade. Communications at all levels are good. Parental contact is regarded as of the utmost importance, and various regular and diverse methods are employed to support this.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

The trustees might like to take into consideration the following suggestions as to where specific improvements could be made;

- clarification of the delegated areas of responsibilities with respect to the needs of the school for all to see would assist the management flow to completion;
- the adopted school policies should all be reviewed, signed and updated annually.

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