

# THE HOWARD SCHOOL

## CHALLENGING THE STEREOTYPICAL VIEW OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN YOUNG MEN

By Head of School, Terry Millar



At the start of 2008, The Howard School was hitting national headlines for all the wrong reasons. “Most violent school in Britain” was the Daily Mail description, even if the reality was somewhat different. Paul Morris, now CEO of The Howard Academy Trust, had taken over as Principal the previous year and was under no illusions as to the task he faced. Yet by the end of 2008, behaviour had been sorted and Ofsted had visited to confirm that the school had moved from satisfactory to good.

The Howard School is a non-selective bilateral boys’ school with a mixed sixth form in Medway, which is a selective area, with 1500 students on roll. Every year a very small number of students join us who have passed their 11+ exam, with the majority either not passing or not having taken the test. In this context it would be easy to have low aspirations and low standards: not at The Howard School.



From 2008 to 2014, academic results increased year on year at both GCSE and A-Level. After a slight dip in 2015, results again increased in 2016, which is particularly impressive given the continued disparity nationally between boys and girls. This can be seen in the table below which shows how The Howard students last year compared to boys nationally from all state schools (including grammars and comprehensives), with our very positive Progress8 score being a particular highlight:

	The Howard	Boys Nationally
Progress 8	+0.21	-0.17
Attainment 8	49.3	47.5
A*-C in English & Maths	59%	58.6%
EBacc Entry	48%	34.3%
EBacc Achievement	21%	19.4%

How has this been achieved? In a variety of ways, but there are some common threads that run throughout. First is a firm shared belief that all students can fulfil their academic achievement, regardless of their starting points or background, within our supportive environment. Second is that that no student would be at a disadvantage from attending The Howard rather than a grammar school. And third is that there are no shortcuts to sustained school improvement.



Curriculum: we have ensured that sufficient curriculum time is allocated to subjects at KS3, including the EBacc subjects. MFL has been a particular focus, as we recognise that non-selective schools can struggle in this area. By allocating more time to languages at the start of their secondary journey and ensuring

high quality teaching and learning in MFL it means we can enter a large number of students into the English Baccalaureate. This has given us the highest percentage for all the Medway non-selective schools of students both entering and achieving the Ebacc.

In addition, we have ensured the examinations chosen are both suitable for our students and offer long term viability. For example, many schools chose to go down the iGCSE pathway for English in recent years, and/or entered their whole cohort for qualifications like the ECDL. Instead we have consistently followed one of the home boards for English, and only used ECDL as an option subject. As a result our English department is in a good place to deliver the new specification, and we are confident that our results in 2016 are not as a result of a ‘quick fix’.



Teaching and Learning: a core team of dedicated staff have consistently worked on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school, which includes whole school training and individualised training programmes for specific teachers. We have successfully trained a number of new entrants to teaching over the years, and have been very flexible with our recruitment which means we are fully staffed in all areas of the school. This year we have started delivering the Outstanding Teacher and Improving Teacher Programmes in partnership with OLEVI to teachers from all Medway schools, using our outstanding teachers as facilitators.

Planning for Excellence: since my arrival in April 2016, I have worked on how to shift The Howard from where we currently are to the next



level. Every member of staff was interviewed as part of this process, and together with all the other available information a specific school improvement plan was developed. We have a small leadership team for the size of school, so to create extra capacity we appointed four excellent middle leaders as associate senior leaders for the year, each with a specific whole school improvement target. So far this is having a very positive impact, as noted by Ofsted in October of this year when they arrived for a short inspection and graded us again as Good. This positive inspection and clear planning framework now provides the platform to move the school forwards.



Finally, the quality of relationships between staff and students, and between different members of staff, are of a very high quality. This cannot always be quantified, but Ofsted recently noted “Staff know pupils and students as individuals, and provide them with support that is appropriate to their different needs.” Teachers care deeply about the students in our school, and this combined with everything else we do ensures we continue to challenge the stereotypical view of underachievement in young men.