

Ralph Thoresby School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108075
Local Authority	Leeds
Inspection number	356299
Inspection dates	25–26 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Heather Barnett 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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1064
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr William Flynn
Headteacher	Mr Stuart Hemingway
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2008
School address	Holtdale Approach Adel, Leeds West Yorkshire LS16 7RX
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 36 lessons and 36 teachers were seen. Meetings were held with groups of students, governors, staff and some external partners. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at students' work and school documentation, such as the development plan, safeguarding policies, risk assessments and student tracking information, and 60 questionnaires from parents and carers and a number of staff and student questionnaires.

- How effectively is the school improving the progress students make, particularly in those subjects which did not perform well and for those groups who underperformed in the 2009 examinations?
- How well is the school developing positive attitudes to learning for all students?
- How well are teaching and learning being developed to meet the differing needs of students?
- How effectively is the specialist status of the school being used to drive improvements?
- How well are leaders and managers establishing structures and practices to support and sustain improvement?

Information about the school

Ralph Thoresby is a slightly larger-than-average comprehensive school. The percentage of students from minority-ethnic groups and proportion of students who speak English as an additional language are higher than average and have risen over the last few years. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly below average, with a rising trend. The percentage with a statement of special education needs is above the national average. The school is a local authority, resourced provision school for physically disabled and visually impaired students as part of the city-wide provision for main stream inclusion. The school has performing arts specialist status and has achieved a number of awards such as the Sportsmark, Inclusion charter mark and Stephen Lawrence award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Ralph Thoresby is a satisfactory and improving school, where students feel welcome and comment positively on the inclusive nature of the school. Staff have worked hard to improve the attainment and progress of students after a dip in results in 2009, particularly for some groups of students and some subjects. This has proved effective, with GCSE success rates showing a marked improvement in 2010. Modular results, end of course results for English and mathematics and school tracking data show that this improving trend has continued into 2011. The school is aware that further improvements are needed to ensure all groups of students fulfil their potential and achieve as well as possible across all subjects.

A strong factor supporting the improving trends are the developments in the curriculum at all stages and levels. These are ensuring that the different pathways and opportunities open to students better meet their individual needs and link effectively to the next step in their progression. The school has placed a strong focus on improving standards in teaching, particularly on eliminating unsatisfactory teaching, and has made some progress here. However, although there are examples of very good teaching, there is still variability in standards and a need to focus on meeting the differing learning need of individual students. There is also insufficient consistency of marking and assessment practice.

There are strong systems in place to care, support and guide students, particularly those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Students feel safe in school and appreciate the efforts of staff to support them. Behaviour is improving but there are still some concerns about the small minority of students who do not meet the high expectation of the school. A number of key initiatives have had significant impact, for example, in reducing the percentage of persistent absentees and the number of students not in education, employment or training at the age of 16.

Developments in the sixth form, both in leadership and management and in the curriculum, have already had a positive impact on outcomes for students. Success rates, and the progress students make, improved strongly in 2010 after a dip in 2009. However, there is still variability across subjects and a number of changes have not yet had sufficient time to show their full impact.

Leaders and managers are working hard to develop a culture of high expectations and staff accountability at all levels. Partnership working is very strong, both in supporting students' well-being and in broadening their learning opportunities. The promotion of community cohesion is strong. The specialist status of the school is being used increasingly well to lead on aspects of staff development, partnerships and broadening learning opportunities. Leaders and managers effectively identify those areas requiring improvement and appropriate strategies are put in place to address them. Many of these already show positive impact, but in a number of cases it is too early to see their full

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effect. In some cases further work is needed to ensure consistency of application across all departments. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise attainment and progress, especially in those subjects which have been underperforming, by ensuring improvement strategies are implemented effectively in all subjects and for all groups of students.
- Strengthen students' learning by making sure that:
 - the work set by teachers in lessons is targeted to match students' differing capabilities
 - teachers provide constructive feedback to students on how they might improve.
- Ensure monitoring is used effectively to improve the consistency of application of agreed procedures, such as those on the marking of students' work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students' achievement and their enjoyment of learning are satisfactory. The progress students make is satisfactory overall, although there have been variations between subjects and for different groups of students. The learning and progress seen in lessons during the inspection was at least satisfactory, and good in a number of examples. Students responded well to the tasks set and worked effectively in groups. Behaviour was mainly good and supported learning. Most students were able to explain what they were doing and how they were going to achieve the set task. The increasing numbers of students from minority-ethnic groups make the same satisfactory progress as their peers. Previously students with special educational needs and/or disabilities had not made as much progress as their peers, but they are now making satisfactory progress. Students with a statement of special educational needs make strong progress.

Attainment on entry is broadly average. There were improvements in a number of key attainment indicators in 2010, such as the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A * C. Although some indicators remained below average, such as the average points score for mathematics, results to date for 2011, and classroom observations, show attainment is now broadly average. Students feel safe in school and get on well with each other. There are some students and a minority of parents and carers who have concerns over bullying but most students feel this is reducing and that the school deals with it quickly and effectively. Students have a good understanding of what is needed to lead a healthy lifestyle and many take part in additional sporting activities. They enjoy taking part in school and community activities and feel they have a voice in helping to improve the school. Strategies to improve attendance, particularly of those who are persistently absent, are having a significant positive impact.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall. The school has worked effectively to eliminate inadequate teaching and raise the base level of performance. Further work is needed to increase the proportion of good and better teaching and ensure there is a clear focus in all lessons on meeting the differing needs of students in the class. In the best lessons students are fully engaged in appropriate tasks, they have a positive attitude to learning and increasing confidence in their work. These lessons have a clear purpose, good pace and a range of interesting learning activities, with teachers building effectively on previous learning. In less strong sessions, work is not tailored precisely enough to fully challenge the most able or support the less able and does not effectively link to previous learning. Target-setting to support students' progress is widespread, but the effectiveness of marking and guidance students receive on how to improve their work is inconsistent across and within departments.

The curriculum is dynamic and evolving well to meet the needs of students and is contributing well to the development of positive attitudes to learning, improving behaviour and attendance. The school is working hard to ensure purpose and relevance in the provision, to increase flexibility and match the development of pathways to students' capabilities and aspirations. The curriculum is enriched by a broad range of extra-curricular opportunities, including twilight examination courses, educational visits and popular activities in sport, performing arts and science. Care, guidance and support are

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good. There are good relationships between staff and students and effective strategies to support students at points of transition. For example, the summer school to support those entering Year 7 enables students to settle down quickly to their studies. Care for the most vulnerable students is good and strategies are in place which help individuals overcome significant barriers to learning. The integration of those students with physical disabilities and visual impairment is good.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders have worked hard to develop a supportive and empowering culture at all levels within the school. Staff are keen to take on leadership roles and all are focused on doing the best they can to help students achieve. This has had a strong impact on some aspects of provision, such as the curriculum, but the school is aware further work is needed, particularly on ensuring consistency of application of strategies in teaching and learning. The governing body has a clear understanding of the school and governors are effectively linked to different departments and aspects. As there have been changes in a number of governors, the governing body is currently working on rebuilding capacity and developing levels of challenge.

Equality of opportunity is very well promoted in terms of developing students' understanding of different communities, groups and individuals. However, the school is aware that further work is needed in narrowing the achievement gap. The school is a harmonious community and has a good understanding of its position within its local community. It ensures that its work links in with local, national and global communities and it has recently introduced the Ralph Thoresby Community Shield to celebrate initiatives in this area. Safeguarding has a high priority within the school. All policies are in place, adults working with students are appropriately checked and staff training is in place. The site is secure and risk assessments are very thorough. There is good collaborative working with key agencies and good arrangements for caring for and protecting the most vulnerable students.

Partnership working is a particular strength of the school. There is very-effective communication with the local authority staff and health-care professionals who work in the resource unit, which supports the progress of students accessing the unit. There is also very-effective dialogue with the building management company to ensure full and effective use is made of all aspects of the building. The specialism is used to develop links with feeder primary schools and the community and there are very-effective collaborative arrangements to broaden the curriculum.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The sixth form is satisfactory with very-strong improving trends. The results that the students achieved in 2010 and the progress they made, when compared to their qualifications on entry, was good in many subjects. In those subjects where performance was weaker, the reasons behind this have been indentified and strategies put in place to address them. As in the main school, there is a lack of consistency in the quality of teaching across the sixth form; this is strong in some subjects and developing in others. The curriculum is a strength of the sixth form, with clear progression routes feeding into it from the main school and effective collaborative arrangements with other providers to broaden the offer. Students feel well cared for and that staff have increasingly high expectations of them. Careers advice and guidance has strengthened. The role of director of sixth form has only recently been introduced and is already having a positive impact, with improving quality of provision, more focused forward planning and increasing numbers of applications. However, the school recognises it is too early to see the full impact of all of these changes on outcomes.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Just over 60 responses were received, which is a low response rate. The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire are happy with their children's experience at the school. Their views are similar to those of the inspection team in almost all cases.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ralph Thoresby School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 67 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1064 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	28	42	35	52	3	4	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	19	28	44	66	3	4	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	22	33	40	60	4	6	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	39	33	49	5	7	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	21	31	41	61	1	1	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	13	19	48	72	4	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	13	42	63	13	19	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	17	25	36	54	5	7	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	27	44	66	3	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	24	35	52	10	15	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	24	39	58	7	10	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	25	37	37	55	3	4	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	25	37	37	55	3	4	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



28 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Ralph Thoresby School, Leeds, LS16 7RX

Thank you for all the help you gave to the inspectors when we were at your school. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing the work you were doing. As well as looking at your work we read the questionnaires completed by your parents; they were most helpful.

We think Ralph Thoresby is a satisfactory school with a good curriculum and good care, guidance and support, and it is improving. Your learning and progress are satisfactory and improving; your examination and test results are now broadly average. Teaching is satisfactory and your improving standards of behaviour are helping it to improve further. You get on well with each other and greatly appreciate the support you receive from all staff. The rate of improvement in the sixth form has improved significantly over the last year and those of you in it enjoy your studies.

The leaders and managers of the school know the school well and are clear about what needs to be done to improve further. They have made changes, such as those in the curriculum, that you feel have made school better, and we agree with you. The main areas for the school to focus on now are to:

- further raise attainment and progress, especially in those subjects which have been underperforming, by ensuring improvement strategies are implemented effectively in all subjects and for all groups of students
- strengthen your learning by making sure that the work set by teachers in lessons is targeted to match your capabilities and that teacher feedback gives you a clear idea of how to improve your work
- ensure monitoring is used effectively to improve the consistency of agreed procedures, such as those relating to marking of your work.

You have a key role to play here by making sure you continue to behave well and work hard at all times. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Heather Barnett

Her Majesty's Inspector

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