

Ruskin Sports and Languages College, A Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111417
Local Authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	356909
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	651
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Pam Minshall
Headteacher	Mrs Ella Brett
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 36 lessons, taught by 36 teachers, and held discussions with governors, staff, students and a representative from the local authority. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents including assessment information, students' work, key policies and records relating to safeguarding, school improvement plans, minutes of governing body meetings, local authority monitoring reports and the school's self-evaluation. The responses from 145 parents and carers to questionnaires were considered, along with 133 replies from students and 26 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The extent to which students' progress and attainment are improving securely and quickly.
- How effectively teachers use assessment to secure the progress of all groups of students.
- The extent to which students are able to learn independently.
- How well leaders and managers at all levels understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and plan appropriately for improvement.

Information about the school

Ruskin Sports College is a smaller than average, 11–16 secondary school serving the community of Crewe. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is slightly higher than the national average. An increasing diversity of minority ethnic groups is reflected in the school's population and the proportion of students from these groups is slightly higher than that found nationally. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. The school was redesignated as a specialist sports college in 2006. It has received the Healthy Schools Award. A new headteacher took up post in September 2009. The school has participated in the National Challenge and Gaining Ground agenda.

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

2

Main findings

Ruskin Sports College provides a satisfactory education for its students and is improving rapidly. The headteacher provides a dynamic vision for the school which has been shared with the community and is clearly focused on raising achievement. The determination of senior leaders and governors to raise aspirations for all students is shaping the school's development, resulting in stronger outcomes. Attainment had been low but improved markedly in 2010 so that students left school with qualifications that were close to national levels. Inspection evidence indicates that performance will continue to rise in 2011 and that students' progress has accelerated, particularly in mathematics. Behaviour is good; students are courteous and polite. A growing number take on responsibilities within school and make an increasingly significant contribution to the wider community. The vast majority feel safe and enjoy all that the school has to offer, including a good range of extra-curricular activities. Attendance has improved and is now above average. Students demonstrate positive attitudes that will equip them well for the next stage in their education or for the world of work. However, their skills in speaking and writing are less well developed. The school's specialist college status continues to make a valuable contribution to students' fitness, self-esteem and team-working skill.

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing proportion that is good and a small amount that is outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge but do not always shape lessons to meet the needs of students with different levels of prior learning and understanding. Sometimes, students who are reluctant to answer questions in class are not sufficiently encouraged to participate. The quality of marking is inconsistent; some is excellent, giving detailed advice on areas for improvement, but some is too brief or irregular to be helpful to students. The school's curriculum is good, having been broadened to provide a wider variety of courses at Key Stage 4 that are suited to students' interests and aptitudes, while at Key Stage 3 there is an increased focus on helping students to acquire learning and thinking skills. Care, guidance and support are good. Pastoral care continues to be a strength of the school and the increasingly close monitoring of achievement and identification of individual barriers to learning is enabling more students to attain better qualifications. Students, whose circumstances have been identified as making them vulnerable, receive very good quality multi-agency support.

The headteacher has an incisive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and is taking rigorous and appropriate action to embed improvement. She has the confidence of the vast majority of parents and carers and staff and has made significant changes to various aspects of school life. The quality and rigour of self-evaluation is inconsistent between subjects. Plans are in place to develop this aspect of leadership. The school's capacity to improve is good. This is because senior leaders have a clear understanding of priorities and there is evidence of sustained and rapid improvement in both provision and outcomes.

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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?

- Increase the proportion of teaching which is good or outstanding by:
 - ensuring that teachers make effective use of information about students' prior attainment to inform lesson planning, so that activities are tailored to meet students' individual needs
 - providing more opportunities for students to develop as independent learners
 - ensuring that all students' understanding is regularly checked during lessons, for instance through varied questioning techniques
 - ensuring that marking is of a consistently high quality and clearly indicates the steps students need to take to improve their work.
- Ensure that all subject leaders consistently monitor and evaluate provision and outcomes, in order to share best practice and tackle weaknesses effectively.
- Implement a school-wide approach to improving students' skills in writing and speaking.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students enjoy their learning when they are actively involved in lessons, when teachers are fair and when their achievements are celebrated. They particularly appreciate the time that teachers make available to support them if they are having difficulties understanding a piece of work. Their enthusiasm for learning decreases when they are required to listen for too long to information or explanations or when they are unclear about the purpose or success criteria for their work. The great majority of students behave well and apply themselves readily to their learning. However, some show reluctance to express their ideas in an extended way when answering questions or presenting ideas. Students work cooperatively in small groups but do not readily direct their own independent learning. Inspectors observed good progress being made in lessons where students were challenged to think for themselves and explore ideas in depth. Progress was only satisfactory when activities failed to generate interest or when students could disengage because there was a reliance on volunteers answering questions.

Students' achievement is satisfactory overall. After a period of decline when attainment in GCSE examinations was well below average, performance rapidly improved in 2010 and 50% of students attained five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. This figure was much closer to the national average than in the previous two years. There are robust indications, from the school's tracking, from lesson observations, and the results achieved by students who have recently taken public examinations in English and mathematics, that attainment is set to rise again in 2011.

Students enter the school with prior attainment which is just below average. In 2010 they left with results which were just below average. This represented satisfactory progress. Progress in mathematics had been weak in the previous two years but improved considerably. The school recognises that there has been underachievement for some girls,

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particularly those with lower attainment on entry to the school, and has taken action to boost their confidence and improve their results. For example, the range of sports activities has been expanded to include those specifically requested by girls, to complement the school's mentoring and intervention strategies.

Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make progress at a similar rate to that of their peers. They make good progress when they are provided with specific support, including that provided by the recently appointed intervention coordinators who work effectively with students and their families to identify and minimise barriers to learning. Sometimes, the progress of these students lessens when teaching does not include strategies to support them in writing or verbalising their ideas.

The vast majority of students think that the school is a safe environment. They are appreciative of the steps taken to secure the perimeter of the school grounds. Students report that incidents of bullying or harassment are extremely rare and that they are effectively dealt with. Sports College status has a positive impact on students' adoption of healthy lifestyles. Many students participate enthusiastically in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities available. They understand what constitutes healthy eating and are aware of the dangers of smoking and substance abuse. Attendance is above average and the number of students who are persistently absent has drastically reduced following concerted action by the school, parents and carers, and partner agencies. Most students are punctual, smartly dressed and positive about their work. Some develop entrepreneurial skills through business projects. With the support of local colleges and businesses, the school is beginning to raise students' aspirations about the range of opportunities available to them beyond full-time education. Students' skills in speaking and writing are less well developed than their other workplace skills.

Students make a positive contribution to the school community through their courteous behaviour and willingness to take on additional responsibilities, as prefects, council representatives and as team leaders. Sports leaders at Key Stages 3 and 4 undertake valuable work with local primary schools that has multiple benefits for them and the schools they work with. Students have raised money for local charities and identified opportunities to support the regeneration of local areas. They exhibit responsible moral attitudes, for instance in mature discussions about the nature of prejudice. Their social relationships are positive and harmonious. Their understanding of other cultures is good, supported, for instance, through a project on aboriginal art for students making the transition from primary school.

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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	2
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	2
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, with an increasing amount that is good, and a small amount that is outstanding. An inspirational physical education lesson, in which Key Stage 4 students designed and led activities for a Year 7 class, exemplified independent learning, precise assessment, positive self-esteem and impressive teamwork. Students' enjoyment was evident because they knew that they had risen to a significant challenge. In a very effective physics lesson, students' progress was enhanced because they were given 'think time' before answering questions and this enabled them to demonstrate higher level responses. However, in too many lessons there is an over-reliance on students volunteering immediate answers to relatively simple questions. Consequently, some students, including the more-able, become passive and their learning slows. Sometimes teachers do not take sufficient account of students' prior learning when planning lessons and this means that the needs of lower attaining students are not always met. Marking is very variable in quality. There are excellent examples, such as in English, where detailed feedback is given along with advice for improvement on key assessment pieces. However, some marking is irregular or perfunctory. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar persist unchecked in some students' work; they are often unclear as to where their mistakes are and how they should rectify them. Some students enter school with poor literacy skills and limited vocabulary. In an effective personal, social and health education lesson, the teacher equipped students with a word bank of adjectives to express emotion.

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This was an effective strategy, indicating that good practice exists in school but has not yet been fully shared.

The curriculum has been broadened to better meet the needs of students. Pathways offered at Key Stage 4 enable students to select accredited courses that match their interests and support their future plans. The number of students who leave school without a plan for future education, training or employment has declined significantly and is now very low. An increased focus on skills acquisition at Key Stage 3 is helping students to make links between subjects. The school has taken effective action to improve its curriculum for personal social, health and economic education and this is now good.

One student commented, 'We all have someone to go to at school if we need help.' This view was endorsed by many who value the good care, guidance and support the school provides. Transition arrangements are strong, including for individuals who are the only ones joining from their primary schools. Art projects help students to explore their feelings about making the move to their new environment. Pastoral support for students is sensitive and nurturing. There is an increased focus on the integration of monitoring progress and removing barriers to learning. Recently appointed intervention coordinators make a powerful contribution as key points of contact between home and school. Support for students identified as being in vulnerable circumstances is carefully coordinated, involving other agencies as appropriate.

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?

Since her appointment, the headteacher has consistently articulated and shared a dynamic vision for the school, focused on raising aspirations and improving achievement for all students. She has brought about many changes in a short period of time and the school is beginning to see the impact of these in significantly improved outcomes. The school's self-evaluation is candid and insightful and there is a real sense of renewed ambition for the future, expressed by senior and middle leaders. The school has benefited from participation in the National Challenge and Gaining Ground initiatives; this has enabled various leaders to work with their counterparts from a high performing school to share improvement strategies. Subject leaders were previously not monitoring and evaluating performance systematically so as to identify best practice and tackle weaknesses. Training and support have been provided to enable them to undertake these duties effectively but this aspect of their work is at an early stage of development. The governing body is well informed, increasingly involved in the life of the school and extremely supportive of the headteacher. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities and are powerful advocates for

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the school in the local community. Safeguarding procedures are robust; policies are regularly reviewed and their impact assessed. The school has an incisive understanding of the community it serves and its specialist sports college initiatives are particularly effective in promoting community cohesion at a local level. Equality of opportunity is strenuously promoted through the school's policies and through its curriculum. Partnerships with parents and carers have been strengthened by regular communications and opportunities to attend school on formal and informal occasions.

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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaire indicated that they are happy with their children's education. Most feel that the school is well led and their children are kept safe. A few parents and carers expressed concerns about unacceptable behaviour. The inspection team investigated these concerns carefully including examining behavioural records and holding discussions with staff and students. Inspectors found that behaviour around school was good and that the strategies used by the school to maintain good behaviour were fair and clear. Several respondents commented on the high level of care their children received. For example, the comment from one that 'my child has flourished because of the support he received moving to this school from primary school' was echoed by students in discussion with inspectors.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ruskin Sports and Languages College, A Community High 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 145 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 651 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	28	85	59	15	10	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	43	30	91	63	9	6	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	45	31	89	61	10	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	51	35	76	52	15	10	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	41	28	87	60	12	8	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	33	23	88	61	21	14	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	17	90	62	24	17	3	2
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)	47	32	84	58	9	6	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	23	90	62	16	11	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	28	75	52	20	14	5	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	16	88	61	19	13	5	3
The school is led and managed effectively	38	26	84	58	16	11	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	56	39	70	48	11	8	6	4

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.



4 February 2011

Dear Students,

Inspection of Ruskin Sports and Languages College, A Community High School, Crewe, CW2 7JT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Many of you gave up your time to speak to us and to complete questionnaires. You were also very helpful when we visited your lessons. You told us how much your school has improved recently and we agree with you. We judged that you receive a satisfactory quality of education and that standards are improving rapidly. We were particularly impressed with the impact that being a sports college has on your lives and on your community. We think that your behaviour is good and that you really play your part in making the school a pleasant, safe and inclusive place to be.

Examination results at Ruskin Sports College improved dramatically in 2010 and we are confident that they will rise again in 2011, provided of course that you keep working hard! Attendance has also improved and very few of you are now regularly absent. Mrs Brett and the staff have high aspirations for the future development of your school. In order to help you do even better and reach higher standards, we have asked them to concentrate on some key things, including the following.

- Ensure that teachers plan lessons that are suited to your different needs so that you can all make progress in your learning.
- Provide more opportunities for you to develop skills to learn independently.
- Ensure that teachers check during lessons whether you all understand the work you are asked to do and mark your work regularly, including comments that help you to improve.
- Make sure that your writing and speaking skills are developed in all subjects of the curriculum.

I am sure that you will continue to work hard and support Mrs Brett and your teachers in taking your school from strength to strength. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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